

One year later

Little sign of separatism's growth

By PETER DESBARATS

Criticism of the governments' handling of the October crisis last year was based on principle and tactics. A year later, the argument about whether the governments erred in principle by enacting repressive measures without justification is continuing and inconclusive. But the other line of criticism, which stated that the War Measures Act and mass arrests in the long run would strengthen separatism in Quebec, has become considerably weaker with the passing of time.

At this stage there is no doubt that the practical results of the Trudeau-Bourassa-Drapeau strategy during the crisis have been all that the various governments could have desired.

The terrorist Front de Liberation du Quebec has been demoralized and even if this is temporary, the 12-month period of relative calm in Quebec has to be counted as a positive gain. As for separatist sentiment in general in Quebec in the past 12 months, there are no solid indications that it has grown.

No substance

Despite the evidence, a few critics are still trying to accuse the governments of tactical error.

Walter Stewart, the associate editor of Maclean's magazine whose new book "Shrug — Trudeau In Power" is published by New Press of Toronto, continues to claim that "For every separatist the government arrested, it



TRUDEAU



BOURASSA



MAYOR DRAPEAU

Their crisis strategy got results desired

created a martyr and 100 sympathetic listeners; for every anti-separatist strengthened in his views by what happened, a moderate was shifted toward separatism by the crisis.

The documentary evidence for this assertion is nonexistent.

Stewart cites the results of the by-election earlier this year to fill the vacancy in Quebec's National Assembly created by the murder of Pierre Laporte, claiming that the 34 per cent of the vote gained by the Parti Quebecois was "slightly up" from the general election result in the same riding in April 1970.

"Slightly up" is right. The increase was a fraction of one per cent.

He also refers to a survey taken last March by two political scientists at Quebec's Laval University in which 15 per cent of the respondents said they had voted for the Parti Quebecois in April 1970 and 17.5 per cent said they would vote for the same party today.

This is hardly an unusual increase in support for a strong opposition party a year after a general election.

Against this microscopic evidence of growing separatist strength is the recent testimony of Parti Quebecois leader Rene Levesque that paid membership in the party has dropped from 80,000 to 30,000 since the April 1970 election.

Survey ignored

Stewart pointedly ignores a survey conducted in Quebec last spring for his own magazine which showed that only two per cent of Quebecers were more favorably disposed towards separatism as a result of the crisis, 24 per cent were less favorably disposed and 74 per cent replied that their attitudes remained unchanged.

Finally, Stewart offers as evidence the statement of Le Devoir Editor Claude Ryan, "that, given a choice between Levesque's separatism and Trudeau's anti-democratic

tendencies, he would choose Levesque." This might well be true but the choice is put in such extreme terms as to be irrelevant.

The real choice that Ryan has faced in the past year has been between Levesque's separatism and Ryan's own brand of federalism. Considering the pressure that the crisis exerted on Quebec moderates last October and Ryan's anger at the way in which certain federal ministers exploited the "provisional government" fantasy, no one in Quebec would have been astounded if Ryan had opted for separatism in the months following last October. The significant fact is that he did not.

Detached spirit

In a recent conversation in Montreal, Ryan said that Levesque had criticized him privately in the past few months on account of the "slowness" of his political development. But he explained that immediately after the

crisis, he and his colleagues at Le Devoir had decided that the Bourassa government in Quebec could not be judged definitively on the basis of its attitude during the crisis.

"A lot of people concluded that it was only a matter of weeks before we would give our support to the Parti Quebecois," said Ryan. "No. We approached the last session of the National Assembly in a completely detached spirit."

His attitude toward the Bourassa government is now one of qualified support. In federal affairs, his commitment to a two-nation approach to Canada and his belief that Trudeau is an impediment to creative negotiation between English and French Canada has been strengthened by the crisis. But this is a far cry from advocating Quebec independence.

"I've not reached the stage where I consider political separation as the only possible solution," he said, "but my feeling is that we can know the answer only when a fair, hard, open negotiation has been attempted with English-speaking Canada. I don't think Trudeau will bring us one inch closer to a real solution."

The fact that Ryan's position has remained basically unchanged by the crisis is strong evidence that the governments' handling of events last October did not strengthen separatist feeling among the population at large although it did harden opinions on both sides of the question.

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