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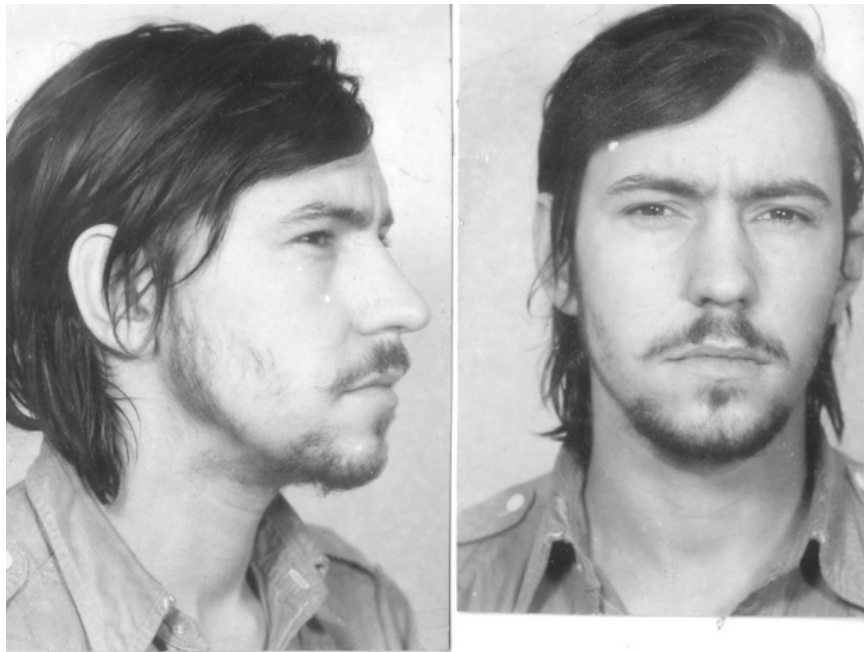
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Graeme Hamilton: Francis Simard was a kidnapper and a killer. Being dead doesn't change that



GRAEME HAMILTON | January 15, 2015 7:45 PM ET
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Police mugshots from the early 1970s of Francis Simard. Simard, one of four members of the Front de libÉration du QuÉbec charged with the murder of a Quebec cabinet minister during the 1970 October Crisis, has died. [Montreal Gazette files](#)

Francis Simard was no hero. He was a kidnapper and killer whose crimes in October 1970 dealt a serious blow to the separatist cause he and his FLQ comrades hoped to promote.

But with the announcement Wednesday of his death at the age of 67 from a ruptured aneurysm, there will be a reflex in some quarters to downplay the violence committed in the name of the oppressed during the October Crisis.

Patrick Bourgeois of the hardline separatist web site [lequebecois.org](#) wrote Wednesday of his “profound admiration” for Mr. Simard’s commitment to the terrorist Front de liberation du Québec. He was, Mr. Bourgeois wrote, “a young man who, in the context of neo-colonial Quebec, decided to sacrifice everything for the revolution, for freedom.”

Even the more moderate *Le Devoir*, which broke the news of Mr. Simard’s death, spent as much time describing Mr. Simard’s impressive book collection and “rich” understanding of Canadian history as it did on the murder that brought him notoriety – that of Quebec cabinet minister Pierre Laporte.

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[Francis Simard dies at 67: Ex-FLQ member was key figure in murder of Quebec minister Pierre Laporte](#)

Thankfully, Mr. Simard left a written record that even the most blinkered apologists will be hard-pressed to refute. In 1982, shortly after he was released on parole, he published a memoir. Translated into English in 1987 as *Talking it Out: The October Crisis from the Inside*, the book undercut revisionist myths that cast Mr. Laporte’s death as part of a conspiracy to undermine the independence movement or as an unfortunate accident as he tried to escape his captors.

"I don't know how to express this. This is the first time I've tried. We made the decision and we killed him. It wasn't an accident. It wasn't like they said it was. It all happened very fast," Mr. Simard wrote.

"Human life is a fragile thing. Fragile. Don't ask me how we did it. I don't know . . . I don't want to remember. I don't want to think about it."

Born in 1947 in the small town of Val-Paradis in Quebec's Abitibi region, Mr. Simard moved to Montreal with his family at a young age. Growing up in a working-class suburb and coming of age in the turbulent '60s, he became immersed in left-wing politics.

He was active in the Rassemblement pour l'Indépendance Nationale, a precursor to the Parti Québécois, and he drew a parallel between Quebec's situation and the struggles against colonialism around the world.

In 1969, he befriended Bernard Lortie and brothers Jacques and Paul Rose, and together they decided to focus their energy on the "fight for national liberation," becoming what would be known as the FLQ's Chénier cell. That fall he was arrested and a search of his home found the makings of Molotov cocktails, but he did not arouse police suspicion again until October, 1970.

Mr. Simard and the Rose brothers were in the United States on their way back to Montreal on Oct. 7 when they heard the news that the FLQ's Libération cell had kidnapped British Trade Commissioner James Cross two days earlier.



Front de libération du Québec (FLQ) member Francis Simard is escorted by police in this undated photo. Postmedia News file
Simard, 67, died Saturday.

Caught by surprise, they headed for a home they had rented in Saint-Hubert on Montreal's South Shore and plotted their next move. "We were looking for a way to prove our strength," Mr. Simard wrote. Mr. Laporte represented a riding near the house where they were staying, and on Oct. 10 they grabbed him at gunpoint as he was outside his home playing ball with his nephew.

He would be held for a week, but when the government refused to cede to FLQ demands, his captors grew increasingly anxious. On Oct. 16, Mr. Laporte tried to escape by throwing himself through a window but only succeeded in cutting himself badly.

"Right there in front of you is someone who is in pain, wounded," Mr. Simard wrote in his book. "You can open the door to freedom for him. You can drive him to the hospital. All the responsibility is yours."

But instead, the next night, they decided to show authorities that they were serious, strangling Mr. Laporte with a chain he wore around his neck. At the time, the entire Chénier cell claimed responsibility, but it emerged that only Mr. Simard and Jacques Rose were present at the time of the killing. The body was found in the trunk of a car near the Saint-Hubert military base.

Mr. Simard never ran afoul of the law after his 1982 release from prison, but he did not abandon his radical politics. In a 2013 interview with *Le Devoir*, he lamented the unrelenting advance of "savage capitalism" and said, "A revolution seems more necessary than ever."

When media were reporting on the 20th anniversary of the October Crisis in 1990, he reflected on how the FLQ actions had proven counter-productive.

"The dream of a revolutionary is to bring about a better way of life," he told TVA. "But then, instead of life, you're confronted with



death. That's the hardest, most dramatic, most tragic thing to experience. You dream of an ideal, something beautiful, but it turns into something ugly."

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