

# Conversation

## with Edward Mann

Edward Mann is a professor of sociology at Atkinson College. His new book, written in collaboration with John Alan Lee, is called *R.C.M.P. vs. the People*. In it he describes the criminal abuses and fearsome political power of the R.C.M.P. and its little known "Security Service". Earlier this week he spoken with Excalibur's Jonathan Mann.

### What Sort of criminal activity is the R.C.M.P. guilty of?

We're talking in the book about the Security Service and not about other parts of the R.C.M.P. It's various kinds of illegal acts extend from tapping phones, breaking and entering, to arson. We are also convinced by studies done by other people in Quebec that there is harassment of people on the political left, of suspects, and brutality towards informers to get their cooperation.

### How widespread are these practices, and how long have they been going on?

Many of these things, like opening mail, breaking in to offices in order to get information, harassing and spying on the political left, have been going on for 25 years. They are the stock in trade of the R.C.M.P.

### Who are the victims of these acts?

The victims of these acts are neither criminals nor spies in the main. They're called subversives, but most of them are simply people who want to change the political system without the use of force. Anybody who is left of center, who gets attached to the N.D.P., who joins a radical organization that's concerned about Chile, may be called a subversive. Groups which are trying to promote the Third World and its problems, including OXFAM, are labelled suspect and potentially, if not actually, subversive.

### What is the Security Service?

The Security Service is the branch of the R.C.M.P. that is concerned with counteracting any espionage by foreign powers and maintaining the security of the country against subversives. It is the political arm of the government in power, to make sure that the government is not threatened, either directly, by violent attacks or armed uprisings, or indirectly, by potential plots.

### Don't you feel that the relatively recent F.L.Q. Crisis has made a clear case for a strong intelligence organization?

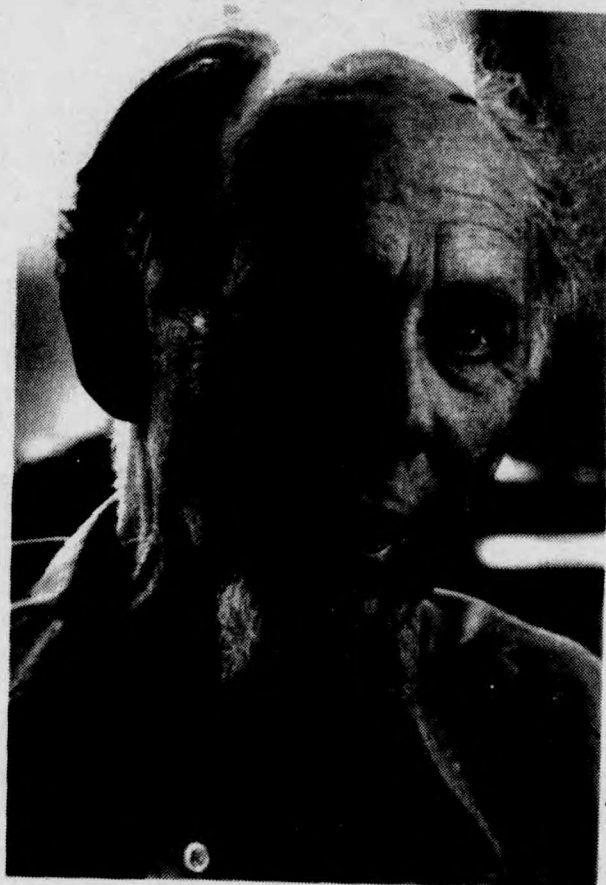
The F.L.Q. case involved, at the most, 30 to 40 people in a province of seven million. In Britain you might have hundreds of people involved in similar types of organizations, like the I.R.A., but that doesn't bring the British government into any strong-arm measures that go beyond the law, or any kind of War Measures Act. In my estimation, the threat was very temporary, very local. It only involved Quebec. And it was magnified out of all proportion.

Probably the orders came not from the cabinet but from the military. There is a report by an important CBC reporter that suggests that the declaration of the War Measures Act, the march on Quebec City, and the search and seizure of people by the hundreds, was a type of military operation to see how they could cope with some potential insurrection in the distant future. I think the whole thing was out of all proportion to the actual danger. But Canada hasn't had any big threat to its internal security, so the least potential threat to the government in power need be interpreted as terrific because of our great history of harmony.

### You mention in the book the planting of a story in the Toronto Sun as well as the release of a false F.L.Q. communique, both drafted by the R.C.M.P. Does the R.C.M.P. have a strong influence over the media?

According to reporters I've talked to, the R.C.M.P. tries to influence the media by dropping stories that are hoped to be big scoops for the particular papers. These stories are not fabrications, but distortions of the actual facts. If the paper falls for the line, and prints the story which is alarmist and distorting, the public gets a false view of what's going on.

### Which of the arms of government — the legislative, executive, or judicial — are responsible for these abuses? Where can we place the blame?



Bryon Johnson

The executive branch — the cabinet — is supposed to be responsible through the Solicitor General who is, on paper, in charge of the R.C.M.P. The Solicitor General gets only occasional and very brief reports from the Commissioner of the R.C.M.P. He might get a two hour report every two or three weeks, about an organization that employs 17,000 people. Of course, they can bias the report to suit their needs.

The Prime Minister, the Solicitor General, and the Minister of Defence constitute a kind of cabinet committee on security. They are supposed to be in touch with what is going on, and to give direction. But if you examine the process of orders going down from the top, and you find that between the cabinet and the R.C.M.P. there are a number of committees on intelligence and security... It's a mystery. Between the cabinet and commissioner there is this layer of two, if not three, levels of committees which meet and give out policy. So it's rather vague as to who are really in charge.

### Is the government taking action to stop these activities?

No, not really. The government has offered to change the law so that they could open mail, but it wasn't passed. Generally, the government feels that they have to keep the confidence of the R.C.M.P. because it's the arm of political control and repression, and if they were to antagonize the heads of the R.C.M.P., they couldn't look to it for the actions they needed.

Even more important, the R.C.M.P. has a file on every person in the cabinet. They know all about their personal lives. So if you, as a member of the cabinet, said you wanted to stop the R.C.M.P. from doing mail-opening, they'd leak to the press that you are keeping a mistress, or have homosexual friends. They could ruin your life. What happened to former solicitor general Francis Fox is probably a lesson in what they can do if they don't like somebody.

### In *R.C.M.P. vs. the People* you suggest that the R.C.M.P. is a tool of Canada's political and economic elite. Do you really feel that this is an accurate description?

All I'm saying is that every government that wants to stay in power has to have a strong federal police force if things are at all unsettled in that country. Right now, things are pretty unsettled across the entire world. In a variety of ways, people are kept in line in Canada. There's no big movement to go socialist or left-wing.

If there was any general strike in Canada, some big labour disturbance, or any big demonstrations in Ottawa to kick out a given government, they would immediately call in the R.C.M.P. in strength. They are a potential tool, if not an actual tool, of keeping the present government — which we all know is in favour of capitalism — in power.

### The R.C.M.P. has defend the secrecy surrounding its operations by appealing to "National Security". How seriously should we take these claims?

I think it's a bogey-man myself. I don't think there's any real threat to national security. There was a threat, in a way, in the last war when the French Canadians didn't favour conscription. But there's no threat to national security today. There may be in the future, if Levesque gets a vote and there is a lot of bad feeling between Quebec and the rest of Canada. But this is an appeal, like Nixon's appeal for executive privilege [in the Watergate scandal], which is very hard for people to put down.

Who knows what the threats are? They will say that "we have evidence", but you don't know because you aren't in the business. It's impossible to check up and see if they are giving you a fancy line or not.

### Would you say that the R.C.M.P. has to create these threats to protect itself as an institution?

Yes. They've got a vested interest in saying that the problems are there and that they are getting more serious, that the KGB is getting more powerful, that we've got to be watching for spies from China, etc., and they'll dress it up so that their piece of work is terribly important. It may be, at times, but I don't see any evidence today, and they won't give me any evidence. They say, "it's confidential, trust us." They'll tell the cabinet, but they can't tell the public.

### Did the R.C.M.P. cooperate with your research?

In terms of giving me information, they didn't give me much, but they didn't say, "You can't come and see us." I met with the top man in this province for security. He gave me some information regarding the committee structure between the R.C.M.P. and the cabinet. The man himself was very friendly. I discovered that those fellows are great on reading spy stories. We discussed James Bond and those kind of books. You could see that these guys liked the intrigue of these mystery writers.

### The book proposes an open intelligence force, one which would notify prospective targets of surveillance in advance, and which would publish the data it collects. Isn't this a rather naive proposal? Don't we need a certain amount of secrecy surrounding the activity of an intelligence gathering force if it is to be effective?

By having it secret you're just maintaining the illusion that it's special and important. You're assuming that the targets don't know already that they're being watched. Anybody who is worth his salt as a spy will be waking precautions. Anybody who is really working for the KGB is being very careful and knows he's under surveillance. Our point is that people who are unjustly accused of being subversives are being spied on all the time. We're wasting money. If you put it out in the open and had an open discussion of it all and they could prove they're not aiding countries hostile to Canada, we could save money by not watching them so carefully.

### Has the R.C.M.P. made any effort to correct itself because of the pressure the public has put on it?

I don't know of any. They may have made some efforts internally but if they have, they haven't made things public. They fired nobody who got involved in dirty tricks. They haven't even demoted people who were involved.

### Does the presence of a new administration signal an end to R.C.M.P. abuses?

I'm afraid not. There are one or two men in the cabinet who maybe would like to limit the powers of the R.C.M.P. I'm thinking about one man, in particular who gave the forward to the book, Elmer McKay. He's only one man among 25 or so.

### What do you propose to remedy the situation?

We propose that the Security Service we taken out of the R.C.M.P., and that it be put under the control of civilians. Furthermore, we would pass an act regarding freedom of information. We'd abolish the Official Secrets Act and we'd put into effect the things we mentioned about groups being examined in public.