

Shadowy dealings of RCMP revealed in book

Men in the Shadows, the RCMP Security Service, published by Doubleday Canada Limited, 1980.

The RCMP Secret Service had had its dirty laundry aired

in recent years. Illegal break and entries, mail-opening, blackmail, harassment and homosexual witch-hunts are among a can of worms of human rights issues being

debated in Canada.

John Sawatsky, a Vancouver Sun reporter, identifies the hypocrisies and the impressive capabilities of our security enterprise in his book

"Men in the Shadows." Along the way he exposes a Canadian institution, of which Canadians know little.

Threats to Canadian security have ranged from American invasions in the 1860s to Nazi spies, to communist informers for the Soviet Union. Institutional espionage on the part of the USSR was exposed by the defection of Igor Gouzenko in 1945 from the Soviet Embassy. Among the revelations was a spy ring acquiring vital nuclear secrets from Canada's project at Chalk River, Ontario.

The service consequently grew with leaps and bounds and not without its casualties. After the punting of communists from the civil service, the RCMP became obsessed with homosexuality as a security risk. At a time when few people came out of the closet, homosexuality came under a list of blackmailable "weaknesses." The Soviets would threaten a person in a sensitive security position into becoming an informer, through knowledge of his or her alcoholism, bad debts, patronizing of prostitutes, having extra-marital love affairs, or other sexual deviancy. However, the RCMP concentrated on homosexuality, which they saw as a moral weakness as well as a security risk. The homosexual witch-hunt encompassed all gays, even those who were recognized as being loyal, patriotic and hard-working members of the Force.

The RCMP developed a slick, effective system incorporating the many parts of its counter-espionage and counter-subversion work. The Security Service consists of sections ranging alphabetically from A to L. The sections include security screening, informers, electronic surveillance, counter-espionage, the filing system and of course administration.

Inarguably, the most effective unit is I section or physical surveillance, often called the Watcher Service. This civilian team works undetected, trailing by car and foot KGB or other agents. Even spies trained in "cleaning" themselves of trailers fail to detect the Watcher Service. This team is often responsible or plays a critical role in the cracking of RCMP cases.

More controversial is the little heard of unit, E-Special. In order for E-section to carry out its bugging and wiretapping, it calls on the services of E-Special, the clandestine activities unit. Illegal break-ins are a politically delicate matter and must be dealt with sensitively and faultlessly. E-Special accomplished the entry of a private company in 1973 in order to steal and copy the Parti Quebecois' membership computer tapes. The operation took three months of planning and two trial runs. The CIA had said it couldn't be done.

Sawatsky explores a critical

low in the Secret Service's operations, the October crisis of 1970. The RCMP did not have the informers to predict the kidnappings of James Cross and Pierre Laporte. Furthermore, they were lost with how to deal with the situation. Inadequate RCMP information had caused the government to induce the War Measures Act unnecessarily as it was later revealed that no conspiracy had ever existed between the two kidnapping cells.

Recovering from an injured ego, the RCMP's response was to over-reaction with the creation of the notorious Quebec anti-terrorism unit. This was the step that led to eventual public exposure of the Secret Service's questionable activities.

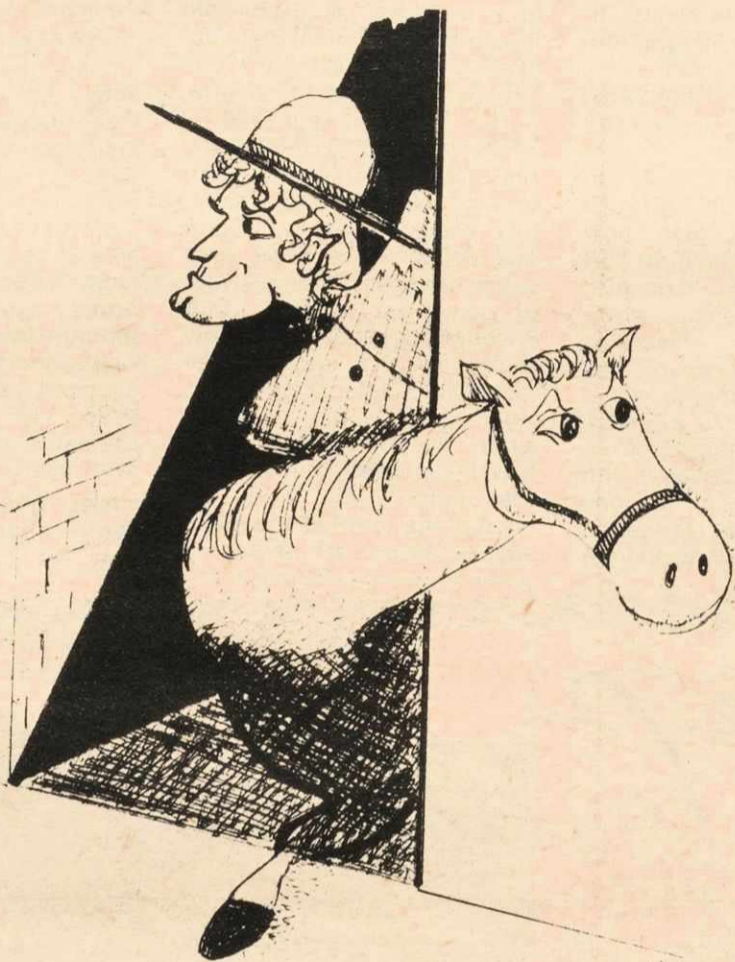
G-section, or the Quebec anti-terrorism unit, employed thuggery to obtain fast results on the FLQ. Established practice for acquiring informers within the FLQ was ignored, instead they reverted to an amateurish and ineffective method of intimidation and bullying.

L'Agence du Presse Libre was a paper believed to have FLQ connections. The RCMP, in conjunction with the Montreal and Quebec police forces, broke into the newspaper premises in 1972, and stole half a ton of files in what was both an obvious and badly engineered police job. It was then a matter of time until the public became aware of such RCMP practices.

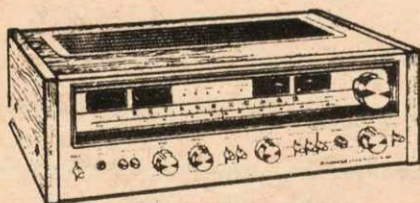
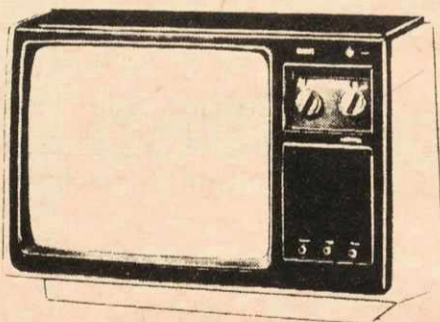
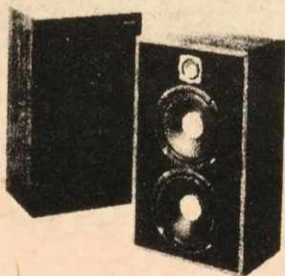
Such are the glimpses of a complex institution as investigated by Sawatsky. His on-the-spot scenes and dramas of the Secret Service help the reader understand some inherent dilemmas in the system such as illegal action. A Mountie who moves from the regular force to the Secret Service must unlearn the entrenched principles of upholding the law. "No longer is he the servant of the law. He now works for the political benefit of the country..." writes Sawatsky.

The Secret Service yearns to separate from the RCMP and become civilian, explains Sawatsky. It is handicapped by a rigid paramilitary structure and the right-wing ideological bias of its members. For instance, it was questionable in the 1960s (and perhaps still is) whether or not the RCMP could distinguish between "subversive elements" and political dissension among youth.

"Men in the Shadows" is a fascinating exploration of the Secret Service. Sawatsky apologizes for possible biases in his presentation which are a result of his sources of information. As one intelligence officer says, "In this business only the failures are known. One of the great frustrations is that you cannot boast about your successes — or else they will no longer be successes."



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