

# R.C.M.P. HARASSMENT ...

## THE RCMP CONTINUE TO MAINTAIN THE RIGHT

Lorne A. Brown, political science professor and co-author of *The Unauthorized History of the RCMP*, analyzes recent revelations about the Force's dirty tricks in the context of its history.

by Lorne Brown  
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The RCMP have been used since before Confederation as a class instrument to support the business community in their struggle against Labour. They have also been used on behalf of the predominantly Anglophone ruling class of our country to suppress challengers from minorities such as the Quebecois and the Native people.

An examination of 19th century Canadian history reveals that the military were used frequently to suppress strikes and other manifestations of labour unrest.

Troops were used scores of times for this purpose in the period from Confederation to 1914. After World War I this role was performed most frequently by the RCMP and other police forces. Professor Stuart Jamieson, one of Canada's authorities on the history of industrial disputes, points out in his *Times of Trouble: Labour Unrest and Industrial Conflict in Canada, 1900-66* that calling open governments to use force against labour is an old tradition among employers in this country:

"Employers in Canada seem to have been all too ready at times to call upon governments to support them in their struggles with organized labor and to sanction the use of force and violence by police or military personnel where they felt their interests to be seriously threatened in industrial conflict situations."

During the 1920's and 1930's, the RCMP developed a reputation for spying upon, infiltrating and sometimes hounding communist, socialist and other left wing organizations. While the main target was the Communist Party, the Force also hounded political figures like J.S. Woodsworth, a pacifist who became the founder and first leader of the C.C.F. The situation became especially repressive during the regime of R.B. Bennett in the 1930-35 period. It was during those years that the main leaders of the Communist Party and scores of others were imprisoned though none of them were involved in attempts to commit sabotage or overthrow the State by force. Hundreds were also deported for their left wing political activities, and some of these to fascist countries where they would be shot or imprisoned upon arrival.

Frank Scott, former Dean of Law at McGill University and an expert on civil liberties, has described Canada as one of the most repressive of all the countries which regard themselves as liberal democracies during this period.

The leader of the RCMP, like their counterparts in the FBI, developed an extra right wing political outlook as they rationalized their harassment for leftists. In 1932, Commissioner MacBrien of the RCMP went so far as to advocate vigilante action against radicals who were organizing the unemployed. Far right sentiments were often expressed in the *RCMP Quarterly* which is the official organ of the Force. For instance an article in the *RCMP QUARTERLY* of January, 1937 supported the Fascist revolt in Spain and expressed sympathy for the regime of Hitler and Mussolini.

As late as April, 1941 Commissioner S.T. Wood was warning Canadians that the Left constituted a greater threat to Canada than the Fascists. "Many may be surprised to hear that it is not the Nazi nor the Fascist but the radical

who constitutes our most troublesome problem."

Even after World War II and the horror revealed to the world at the Nuremberg trials the official publications of the RCMP occasionally expressed sympathy for the Nazis. Then in *Law and Order in Canadian Democracy*, published in 1949 with a second edition in 1952, we are told that the Nazi regime might have worked in Germany if the leadership had not gone to extremes.

"Natural Socialism could probably have been made to work in Germany if its leadership had not fallen into the hands of sadists whose excesses were to bring death or ruin to millions of people. It need hardly be emphasized how advantageous it would have been if Germany had found a system suited to the idiosyncracies of her people, a system by which she could have grown strong and prosperous and become a bulwark against the encroachment of Communism."

The RCMP were first organized as the North-west Mounted Police (NWMP) as a means of getting the Indians of Western Canada onto reservations and making the West safe for the CPR, the Bank of Montreal and white settlement. They were designed as a colonial military force and were appropriately modelled after the Royal Irish Constabulary and the Imperial Police in India.

By the late 1880's the NWMP had succeeded in their task of confining the Indian mainly to reservations though not without the resistance exemplified by the Saskatchewan Rebellion of the Metis and Cree in 1885.

By this time the Force was already engaged in activities which were to become an important part of their duties in the future. They broke a strike on the CPR in 1883 and another among CPR construction workers in 1885. In 1883 they even acted as strike breakers running its trains.

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Recent disclosures about RCMP undercover activities, many of which have been illegal, have revealed how widespread the secret police network has become, and the length to which the RCMP and their political superiors are willing to go to suppress political and economic dissent in our country.

The revelations so far indicate that police spying and harassment have reached mammoth proportions and yet we may have only touched the tip of the iceberg. So far, it has been established that the RCMP have engaged in the following activities:

- 1) Broken into the office of the Agence Presse Libre du Quebec (APLQ) in 1972 and stolen files and documents.
- 2) Illegally entered the offices of the Partis Quebecois (PQ) in 1973 where they stole files and documents.
- 3) Bugged offices used by the Quebec Common Front of trade unions in 1972 and turned over information on their bargaining strategy to the Bourassa government of the day, with whom they were negotiating a new contract for state employees.
- 4) Spied upon the PQ, NDP, National Farmer's Union (NFU), Canadian Union of Public Employees (CUPE), Indian Association of Alberta, and a whole host of smaller economic and political groups on the Left of the political spectrum.
- 5) Spied upon and kept files on the private lives of Cabinet Ministers, senior civil servants, and MP's. In some cases this has involved tape recordings of conversations in the bedrooms of the VIP's under surveillance.
- 6) Drawn up lists of civil servants and potential civil servants alleged to be security risks.
- 7) Burned down a barn and stole dynamite from a construction site.

That the RCMP would engage in these activities comes as no surprise to people familiar with the history of the Force. They

The role of the Mounted Police during the Winnipeg General Strike of 1919 was to save the Force from oblivion and guarantee their future. By World War I all of Canada was organized into provinces each with their own provincial police forces. Most secret police work was then done by the Dominion Police and Army intelligence. The RNWMP were confined in jurisdiction to the North and limited duties in the Western provinces. Since law enforcement is a provincial responsibility there was talk of disbanding the Mounties after the War. This talk ceased abruptly after the Winnipeg General Strike.

During the Winnipeg General Strike the municipal police force sympathized with the strikers. Consequently most of them were fired and policy policing was done by "specials" who were hired for their anti-strike sympathies and by the RNWMP who played a key role in breaking the strike.

This was a period of intense industrial unrest throughout the country and the federal government, as a result of what they learned from the suppression of the Winnipeg General Strike, created the RCMP out of the old RNWMP. The RCMP absorbed the old Dominion Police including their secret service and became the main federal police force throughout Canada. The Force was greatly expanded and was soon very active breaking strikes and spying upon trade unions and left wing parties and organizations.

The Force was mobile so that a contingent could be sent into a locality to break a strike and after the dirty work was done, did not have to live with the consequences. The Force also maintained a policy of moving police officers frequently so that it was difficult for them to develop firm roots in any one community.

During the 1920's the RCMP performed their duties in labour disputes admirably from the point of view of the great corporations and their political friends in governments. This role

have a long history of contempt for civil liberties and there are many instances in the past where they have gone to the point of breaking the laws which they are supposed to uphold. The top officers of the Security Service (S.S.) have long been known to have ideological leanings far to the Right of the political spectrum.

Thus civil liberties associations, trade unions, and left wing organizations have grown accustomed to combatting violations of civil rights and threats to free political expression. In this sense the present revelations are merely providing the general public with a picture of the RCMP which was previously known only to a minority of the Canadian public.

What is more frightening than the recent activities of the RCMP has been the attitudes of the Trudeau government to their activities. They have displayed the secretiveness, arrogance, and authoritarianism which was evident when they imposed the War Measures Act for the first time during peacetime in 1970. The original strategy of the RCMP and the government was to cover up all of the above mentioned activities. It was only a series of events beyond their control which brought any of the clandestine activities into the open.

The break-in at the APLQ office was first revealed by Sergeant Robert Samson of the Security Service when he was tried and convicted for attempting to blow up a house owned by an executive of Steinberg's, the supermarket chain. Samson was caught when the bomb he was placing exploded prematurely and caused him serious injury. When the case of the APLQ break-in became public the strategy of the RCMP was to have the people involved plead guilty and thus avoid the cross questioning which would have revealed further information during the trial.

The RCMP officer involved, Donald Cobb, along with officers for the Quebec Provincial Police and the Montreal police, were given an absolute discharge by an obliging judge who even commended them for breaking the law. Since the break-in, Cobb has been posted to Chief Superintendent.

was greatly expanded during the intense unrest of the 1930's and especially after most provinces disbanded their provincial forces and contracted police work to the RCMP for economic reasons. Most Canadians have heard something about the major confrontations which resulted in considerable bloodshed such as the Estevan Strike of 1931 and the Regina Riot of 1935.

However, there were by no means isolated instances. RCMP were used against trade unionists and the unemployed during hundreds of occasions throughout these years. Stuart Jamieson regards them as having become a major influence over the course of events in Canada because of how they were used. "The RCMP has thus become a highly persuasive force in Canadian Society. Its presence has been felt with enough force to tip the scales of battle in hundreds of strikes and labour demonstrations."

The *RCMP Quarterly* continued to carry occasional articles espousing a far right political philosophy until the federal government, under considerable pressure, ordered them to stop making public statements of a



political nature in 1963. During the 1950's and early 1960's the RCMP continued their activities directed against the Communist Party and left wing trade unions.

They also harassed the peace movement and one of their targets was the Combined Universities Campaign for Nuclear Disarmament (CUCND). The main purpose of this movement was to prevent Canada from acquiring nuclear weapons and at one time it enjoyed considerable sympathy from prominent individuals in all of the major political parties. Since the main of CUCND was on the campuses the secret police began invading the classrooms to track down "subversives". This became so widespread that the Pearson government promised to put a stop to it in 1963 after vigorous protests from the Canadian Association of University Teachers (CAUT) and the National Federation of Canadian University Students (NFCUS).

Secret police activity seems to have declined somewhat after 1963 and then began increasing in the late 1960's. New targets included the National Farmer's Union, the anti-Vietnam War movement, student groups, independent organizations in Quebec and organizations assisting draft dodgers and deserters who had come to Cuba to avoid participating in the Vietnam War. The RCMP often co-operated with the FBI for some of these activities and in 1970 they went so far as to kidnap the American deserters who were legally resident in Canada and handed them over to U.S. Naval police at the border. The secret police were becoming bolder and beginning to embark on the expansion of their activities which would eventually lead to the revelations of recent weeks.

The use of the police and the military against workers, farmers, native people and leftists over a 100 year period amply demonstrates some of the main purposes of the policing function in our society. In this sense Canada differs only in detail from other countries with a similar social system.

## ...THE TIP OF THE ICEBERG!

Trudeau has claimed that the RCMP may be justified in breaking the law in the name of national security. He claims we could solve the problem of illegality if Parliament would "make such types of surveillance permissible by the RCMP or by whatever security agency you have."

Both Trudeau and Fox have suggested that the problem might be solved by making the Security Service independent of the RCMP but perhaps with even wider power. Apparently we are to believe that the secret police under another name will no longer be a threat to our political liberties.

The next dangerous statement to come from a government Minister has been made by Trade Minister Jack Horner, who declared that Rene Levesque is no "ordinary premier" and

**The RCMP has a long history of contempt for civil liberties and there are many instances in the past where they have gone to the point of breaking the laws which they are supposed to uphold.**

By a strange coincidence the commission is headed by Mr. Justice David C. McDonald, a former President of the Alberta Liberal Association. The other two commissioners are also Liberals and all three have past associations with Solicitor-General Francis Fox. The terms of reference of the Commission are narrow and any hearings dealing with "national security" matters will be held in camera.

The McDonald Commission has not yet begun to hold hearings and the additional information which has come out since its appointment has resulted from the efforts of the Quebec Government commission, Opposition MP's and part of the press. Federal Government spokesmen have been unrepentant and both Prime Minister Trudeau and Francis Fox have asserted that the secret police may be given even more authority in the future. What information the federal government has revealed, under Opposition prodding, has been revealed in an attempt to "save face" on the assumption that the Quebec commission will loose much of the information in any event.

therefore, it should be open season on Levesque and the PQ. "He's bent on dividing my country . . . I don't mind if somebody did espionage work on him for my country." That a cabinet minister can stay in office after such a statement is an indication of what we can expect from the Trudeau government.

Canadians should ask themselves a couple of questions about the present controversy surrounding the disclosure of the RCMP activities. One question is why the Trudeau government insists upon defending their activities and even suggests that police power be extended.

Would it not be better for the government, politically, if they took vigorous steps to convict those guilty of illegal acts and take disciplinary measures designed to curb police activity? The answer to this question might relate slightly to RCMP blackmail concerning the private lives of important politicians. But more importantly is the importance of the political police to the strategy of the federal government over the next few years.

The Quebec people may vote in the near future to establish an independent country and the federal Liberals appear bent on preventing

In Canadian society as it is presently constituted the police are designed as a political police to be used on behalf of employers and the State in their struggles with organized labour. They are also designed to serve the interests of the entire ruling class against those who merely attempt to defend themselves from the effects of the system or organize to protest against some of its injustices.

The secret police are an entrenched and powerful part of the state apparatus and it is important to keep this in mind as Canadians prepare to defend their civil liberties. The Trudeau government should be kept under pressure and held responsible for the abusive police power. However, we must not be so naive as to believe that a change of Ministers or even a change of government will change the situation in any really important way. Governments may change but the secret police will remain and they will continue to serve the same class interests regardless of the party in office and regardless of whether they are a branch of the RCMP or an entirely separate police force.

When one examines the history of the basic role of the police and the military in Canada it becomes apparent that the activities of recent years are now more widespread. This is because the political and economic situation and the authoritarian tendencies of the Trudeau government are in keeping with what the police and military have always been used for in our secure society.

While the Trudeau government continues to take a hard line in defense of secret police activities more illegal activities are being uncovered. These included illegal opening of mail over a 32 year period, the employment by the RCMP security service of a vast network of spies in the Post Office and the civil service and spying in trade unions by military intelligence. And more revelations are promised in the weeks to come.

this at any cost. There is also going to be high unemployment and other economic and political crises to harass those who advocate radical alternatives to the existing system and even those who advocate militant forms of protest against existing conditions.

The Trudeau government is attempting to get us accustomed to accepting the widespread use of the police in a political way as a part of the process of cracking down on dissent generally. In this sense the government attitudes filter into a general pattern which has become noticeable in the past couple of years. Other elements of the tendency towards greater authoritarianism and preparations for the use of force include:

1) Government attacks on the CBC and the press for alleged separatist and radical sympathies. This is an attempt to force the media to be even more subservient to the status quo than they are already.

2) The ordering by the armed forces of 400 new riot control vehicles and the training of a "special forces" unit at Petawawa military base.

3) Statements by Defence Minister Barney Danson and other spokesmen that military conscription might be a desirable thing for the country.

Another question we should be asking is why the Opposition and much of the press is raising such a ruckus about RCMP surveillance right now. Police surveillance and harassment has plagued trade unions, native groups, and left wing organizations for years and has elicited only minor concern from the major political parties and the press.

Why the sudden torrent of criticism directed at the RCMP and the government? The answer seems to be that they have overstepped their "acceptable" bounds by spying upon "respectable" and significant political parties like the PQ and the NDP, and even individuals within the Liberal and Conservative parties. Spying upon trade unionists, militant farmers, organized native groups and Marxists or communist organizations is apparently "acceptable" but when those who share actual power in the political system begin spying on each other, it is going too far.

