

Spying on Canadians: The Royal Canadian Mounted Police Security Service and the Origins of the Long Cold War by Gregory S. Kealey

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[Aller au sommaire du numéro](#)

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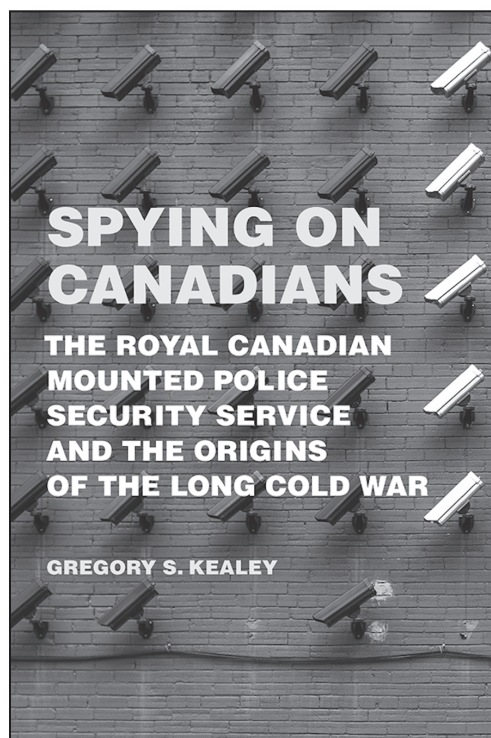
By Gregory S. Kealey

Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2017. 276 pages. \$70.00 cloth ISBN 978-1-4875-0166-2, \$29.95 paper ISBN 978-1-4875-2158-5, \$29.95 e-book ISBN 978-1-4875-1371-9. (utorontopress.com/ca).

Since Confederation, Canada has had a security service tasked with ensuring that identified domestic and international enemies, including Fenian Irish Republicans and, later, labour and Left political groups, could not freely operate, regardless of their legal status. The ability of historians to access records relating to these activities, even after more than a century, remains highly restricted, and has proven to be a source of contention with the Royal Canadian Mounted Police (RCMP) since at least the 1960s.

Gregory S. Kealey's latest work, *Spying on Canadians*, is a collection of articles and book chapters that had previously been published between 1988 and 2003. Co-authors of these chapters include Andrew Parnaby, Kirk Niergarth, and Reg Whitaker, themselves notable scholars of Canada's intelligence services. The chapters are divided into three sections on the nineteenth century, the origins of the "long Cold War," and Kealey's battles to gain access to RCMP files over the past several decades. The introduction makes plain that this collection "is intended to add to the political demands for a new commitment for a transparency in national security appropriate to our purportedly democratic society" (9).

For many decades, Kealey has been one of Canada's foremost scholars of labour and the Left. His interest in spying



and state surveillance in Canada grows out of this field, and he finds considerable overlap between the rise of the Canadian state and the repression of targeted groups, including labour. The second part of the book, in particular, presents evidence of surveillance of labour groups by paid informants, motivated by governmental fear of communism/Bolshevism, and which led to the creation of the RCMP at the end of the First World War, when the future of a national police force looked in doubt a few years earlier.

Kealey also repeatedly expresses his dismay at Canadian acquiescence to state authority. The lack of debate regarding the spy activities of Canada's early secret service, the Western Frontier Constabulary, for example, are to Kealey evidence of Canadians behaving differently towards the state than their British counterparts. Where the latter

were profoundly suspicious of any forms of policing in the Victorian era, Kealey notes that “the suspension of *habeas corpus*, political arrests without charges, mail seizure, penetration agents, perhaps *agents provocateurs* – all were present in these formative years of the new [Canadian] nation state.” (31) Only the victims, it seems, found cause to challenge these actions, demonstrating a preference for “peace, order, and good government,” and a willingness to fear “foreign” enemies who promoted republicanism and communism.

Kealey’s opening chapter, his presidential address to the Canadian Historical Association in 1999, is an eye-opening look at how the Access to Information and Privacy process in Canada shapes what it is possible to know about the historical actions of the RCMP. Kealey details how, beginning in 1985, Canadians were allowed to request access to RCMP Security Service records, though these requests often met with “unwarranted time delays and unnecessary redactions” (4). The reluctance to share records on its sustained campaigns to suppress and discredit labour groups are telling examples of the RCMP trying to maintain tight control over what it is possible to know about its past actions.

While many historians have offered glimpses into the challenges they have faced in their archival searches, this book makes plain the oppositional relationship of scholars and Canada’s security services. Kealey details the lengths to which the RCMP and, more recently, the Canadian Security and Intelligence Service (CSIS) have gone to try and prevent him from accessing, for example, the names of informants who were operating around 1919. The justification for such information being withheld? If informants in the present learned that their information would become public record in the future (no matter

how long after their deaths), they would be less likely to cooperate. This oppositional nature is epitomized in an RCMP file Kealey obtained on the Labour History Group, naming Kealey and others as trying to engage in subversion (19). Kealey provides copies of the requests he has made over the years, as well as some of the records that the RCMP and later CSIS were forced to share with him. A book like this, in forcing such arguments to be debated, serves as a valuable lesson in how the state and those who would examine it critically utilize legislation and the courts to gain access to what has previously been forbidden.

The book’s weakest point is the repetition of information, a result of drawing upon a series of chapters and stand-alone articles from other sources. Where a singular monograph would only have gone over the details of the founding of the Western Frontier Constabulary once, for example, it appears twice here. And Kealey also repeats content regarding the composition of the RCMP Security Service’s officers and informants more than once as well.

The collection is also better suited to readers who are already familiar with the security services. While providing an overview of Canada’s first security services and their actions over eighty odd years, Kealey’s account is more process-based than narrative driven. Certainly, all readers will come out better informed, but it is possible for those without a grounding in the field to find themselves looking for context, while still being gripped by Kealey’s account of the struggle to find a more appropriate balance between state security and access to historical records.

These are distractions from an otherwise fascinating account of a career that has been spent in no small measure challenging state systems and arguing for the release of documents and information that can pro-

vide Canadians with a better understanding of the lengths their government has gone to in the past to repress certain forms of thinking and action inside its borders. It is also a passionate call for ensuring proper

accountability for Canada's security services, as they have proven time and again that they will not willingly give up their secrets.

Colin McCullough, Ph.D.

Overcoming Niagara *Canals, Commerce, and Tourism in the Niagara- Great Lakes Borderland Region, 1792-1837*

By Janet Dorothy Larkin

Albany, NY: State University Press of New York, 2018. 266 pages.
\$90.00 hardcover (US). ISBN13: 978-1-4384-6823-5

As a long-time resident of the Niagara region, at times the area's peninsular-like geography renders it almost invisible in the landscape of southern Ontario. Moreover, despite thriving pockets of tourism, generally organized around wine, Niagara Falls, and Niagara-on-the-Lake's Shaw Festival, Niagara's economy often struggles with plant closures or reductions in operations. Its status as a borderland has at times been as much of a hindrance as an asset. Surges in the Canadian dollar, for example, lead to corresponding increases in cross-border shopping in Buffalo or Niagara Falls, New York, while tightened controls at the border can make it more difficult for American tourists to return the favour.

Yet as Janet Dorothy Larkin's *Overcoming Niagara* demonstrates, such was not always the

case. Although the Niagara River and Falls have been seen as obstacles dividing British America from the United States, Larkin's book makes a compelling case for them as an important link in a number of networks, bodies of water that connected the colony of Upper Canada to the new republic and linked both to the West. While much has been written about the canals that cut

through the landscape, the Erie, Welland, and (to a lesser extent), Oswego, as Larkin points out these waterways have been seen through the lenses of nation or empire. Political leaders on both sides of the border assessed the canals for their potential to shore up military defence or to circumvent each others' markets. However, by shifting her focus to the perspective of those who advocated for, designed, and (where sources allow) built the canals,

