

CRIMES
OF THE
SECRET
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POLICE

ROBERT DION

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Dedication

In the hope that this book will help to make of Québec a country of liberty, so that Valérie, Loïc, Catherine, Marc-André, Patrick, Jean-François, my dear Guillaume and others may flourish and not fear for their personal liberty when they celebrate life on the walls of their schools or their factories.

My sincere thanks to those who have helped me dispel some of the shadows surrounding the events which follow. Some of these people have already suffered a great deal. It would therefore serve no purpose to name them, and so subject them to new difficulties.

Warning

In do not claim, in this book, to have revealed every detail of all the criminal activities of the RCMP and other police forces in Québec. The more limited aim of this book is to reconstruct three of the many crimes which have been carried out by the RCMP, one of them with the help of the other two police forces in Québec, and the other two solo. The book clearly demonstrates that the police can commit criminal acts with impunity. It also shows, beyond the shadow of a doubt, that those who are politically responsible for these forces do not control them, and must often endorse and cover up their activities in order not to suffer political reverses at the next election. Finally, these pages demonstrate that the judiciary, upon occasion, is subservient to the political authorities and the police machinery. It is ultimately the judiciary which must wrap legal camouflage around whatever the other participants are unable to hide.

The disillusioned citizens of Québec, like those of Canada and of what are called the western democracies, have long folded their arms in resignation, and accepted the intrusions of the police forces into their daily lives. Little by little, during periods of crisis and of political and economic upheaval, they have allowed themselves to be robbed of their basic liberties.

And so, in 1972, the Québécois did not react very strongly when the police ransacked the offices of a progressive news agency whose only crime had been to publish information about the causes of the problems that faced the country. Five years later, when an inquiry was set up to look into this affair, public reaction was equally complacent. However, the inquiry went on to reveal that this act of pillage had not been an isolated case of illegal action by the police. Unfortunately, three of the four most important newspapers in Québec were at that time on strike, and therefore were unable to publicize the daily stream of sordid revelations. A number of excellent journalists could not do their job—a particularly unfortunate situation, under the circumstances.

Preface

I am terrified.

And I am not alone. Any sane person in this country who has paid even the slightest attention to the hearings of the Keable Commission and the McDonald Commission (which were, respectively, inquiring into police activities in Québec and into the activities of the Royal Canadian Mounted Police in Canada) must be shaking in his or her shoes. Not only must we fear for national security, we must be equally concerned about our own personal security.

My fear is so great that I hesitated a long time before deciding to make the "revelations" which follow. Should they come to the attention of unscrupulous foreign powers, they might give those powers ideas which could truly endanger our national security. Furthermore — knowing RCMP super-sleuths as I do — I am convinced they would immediately add insult to injury, and accuse me of collusion with those foreign powers. They would undoubtedly confer upon me the title of grand master of an entire network of international espionage in the pay of Havana, Algiers, Prague, Moscow or even Peking. True... I love Chinese food. Is that not the best possible proof that I am a disloyal citizen, disputing the virtues of the Big Mac, one of the great symbols of Christian, white (of race and of tongue*) and North American free enterprise?

The following declaration should be enough to condemn me: "Our RCMP, that famous Mounted-Police-which-always-gets-its-man-to-the-glory-of-God-and-of-the-leader-of-one-of-His-religions-Her-Gracious-Majesty-Elizabeth-II, is so utterly incompetent that anybody who wanted to make a film of its exploits would have to turn to the greatest comedians of cinematic history in order to cast the parts properly." But then, stupidity has always had high entertainment value...

The likes of Donald Cobb, Roger Cormier, Jean Coutellier, Claude Brodeur and other ace protectors of national security (as well as their lawyers and those of the solicitor-general of Canada), by

* Cf. the proverbial taunt of the Québec anglophone to the francophone: "Speak white!" meaning, "Speak English!" — transl. note

their testimony on their own behalf or on behalf of their clients, demonstrated either their incompetence or their outright refusal to co-operate with the two commissions of inquiry which were trying to throw some light on the events with which the police were being reproached. But, above all, it was the arrogance with which these people defied the two commissions that startled the country.

Some people wondered if this arrogance was simply the only way left for these witnesses to hide the fact that "the force" had so lobotomized them that they were no longer capable of thinking for themselves. As if the training which they had received had had the goal and the result of forming their attitudes so as to render them permanently and totally impervious to the ideas, new or old, circulating in this country and elsewhere. As if their only mission were to prevent the free circulation of these ideas, rather than to evaluate them — let alone share them.

Many facts support this thesis. The members of the RCMP who have testified to date have claimed that it never bothered them that police authorities and politicians denied any police involvement in the illegal search which they themselves had carried out (or of which they had knowledge). They neither questioned their own behaviour, nor asked their superiors for an explanation. Much less informed the solicitor-general of Canada, the minister responsible for the RCMP!

On the contrary: these policemen continued the work which they had begun. Later, they helped to cover it up. And today, they continue to protect their superiors and the politicians who, at the time, protected them. As one can see, the cover is ample enough to obscure a whole crazy world of police intrigue.

• What other conclusion is possible? These super-cops, who bear the responsibility for national security, lose the originals of documents which they insist are of the greatest importance to this security. Their memories turn out to be as leaky as sieves when they are required to talk about (as they claim) "the sole illegal activity" of their careers. They forget the names and faces of people with whom they rubbed shoulders on a daily basis, and with whom they are still in relatively frequent contact.

When national security became dependent on such feeble memories, it faced its greatest threat ever. That is the first statement that must be made.

Another explanation, though, would be that national security was never threatened in the slightest by the activities of the APLQ (Agence Presse Libre du Québec). Hence the present loss of memory by police officers. The hearings, however, suggest that their memories are primarily suffering from the fact that they committed so

many illegal activities they simply cannot keep the jumble of details straight.

But our super-cops make up for tiny brains with well-developed muscle, as some unintended revelations during the hearings demonstrated.

The institution of the RCMP cannot enjoy my confidence as far as its ability to protect national security is concerned, because the Keable Commission has shown that at least one important document intercepted by our trusty federal agents turned up almost immediately on the desk of the Cuban under-secretary of the Interior. For those who might ask what harm there is in that, one may reply that while our government has good diplomatic and (especially) commercial relations with Cuba, which it calls a friend, the RCMP remains convinced that Havana is a danger to the national security of Canada, and largely treats Cuba like an enemy.

Now, it could be that this merely illustrates the advantage of "détente" over the cold war which has existed between (for example) the United States and Cuba ever since the Castro revolution... But I digress...

Furthermore, every one of us, Québécois or Canadian, must fear for his own personal security since it has been proven that we cannot count on the vigilance of the RCMP's political masters to control the zeal of its men who, in the course of duty, carry "force" beyond its authorized limits. The solicitor-general has never denounced the illegal activities of his agents. Nor has he ever arranged compensation for their victims. On the contrary: to date he has taken arbitrary and fallacious refuge behind section 41 of the Federal Court Act, whereby he may refuse information and documents to a judge on the grounds that to disclose them would put national security in danger.

To give just one example of many, he refused to enter as evidence before the Keable Commission the letter which had been sent to him on December 19, 1972, by the senior management of the RCMP. This letter allegedly informed him of the illegal search. Were this proven, it would mean that the solicitor-general of Canada was lying when he claimed, as he did for four years, to have been unaware of the APLQ break-in by the police.

Yet this letter must logically have given rise to the recommendations of an analytical report and the letters from officers of the RCMP which accompanied it. The analytical report of a letter by Jacques Cossette-Trudel, an FLQ member in exile in Cuba, to Louise Vandelac of the APLQ, was supposedly presented at the same time as the letter itself to Prime Minister Trudeau and to the Cabinet Committee on Security and Intelligence. Yet the solicitor-general

did not admit to being aware of police involvement until after the statements made by ex-constable Robert Samson in 1976. This notorious letter—which gave the RCMP the pretext for the illegal search—was very probably in the hands of the force before that search took place. While testimony before the Keable Commission has not proved this hypothesis beyond all possible doubt, it does strongly indicate that, at the very least, the RCMP knew the contents of the letter before Operation Bricole.*

Worst of all, the famous analytical report is so flagrantly incompetent that it is hard to understand how Prime Minister Trudeau, a man well-versed in matters of intelligence, could take it seriously. Let us simply observe that the RCMP analyst charged with this important hush-hush task was a young woman of 24 years of age, still a psychology student, who had at that time only been with the force for six months. Never mind the extraordinary importance which she attached to the relations between the APLQ and Cossette-Trudel, and the Cuban news service, Prensa Latina. She didn't even know that Prensa Latina had had its own office in Montréal for more than two years by then, staffed by two journalists.

Let us, however, observe—merely as one of life's coincidences—that the analyst in question, Marie-Claire Dubé, is the daughter of Yves Dubé, former commanding officer of "C" division in Montréal, and that one of his men was the celebrated Donald Cobb, the RCMP officer who acknowledged to Judge Vincent that he had been the one to authorize the illegal search. Just a coincidence, of course, for Ms. Dubé assured the commission that even though she was living at home with her father, she had never discussed this matter with him before Robert Samson made his revelations in 1976.

Our concern for national security is also fuelled by the clumsiness of the lawyers acting for individual members of the RCMP called upon to testify, for the RCMP itself and for the solicitor-general. It is all the more serious because the witnesses themselves, noting that their lawyers were the ones letting slip all these revelations, must have wondered who needed enemies, with friends like these.

For example, one lawyer blurted out that if the commission wanted to know more about the Cuban news service Prensa Latina, it should address itself to members of the anti-espionage service. The same lawyer also clumsily let slip the fact that the RCMP had committed other illegal acts and that the Québec minister of justice had been so informed by the solicitor-general of Canada.

* Code name for the APLQ break-in—transl. note

Another lawyer emphasized that this federal-provincial communication had not taken place until a few months after the solicitor-general had already told the McDonald Commission about the event in question. That statement amounted to an implicit admission that Mr. Francis Fox had deliberately obstructed the workings of the Québec ministry of justice by concealing from it facts of which he was aware.

Two affidavits deposited with the Keable Commission by the solicitor-general were rejected for mistakes in preparation (the use of the French language, at the cabinet level no less, was also inadequate). As well, they failed to respond properly to the summons which had been issued to appear before the Keable Commission.

But the crowning touch was surely the final affidavit filed by the solicitor-general. Only one portion of it was judged acceptable by Commissioner Keable, and it contained a bizarre passage in which Francis Fox blandly insisted that the documents which the RCMP had stolen were now his property.

There was also the time when Fox mocked Commissioner Keable by trying to make him swallow the story that the letter from the senior management of the RCMP to his predecessor had been written in 1973 rather than in 1972—in contradiction to a statement in an appendix to the affidavit which Fox himself had presented to the Québec Commission of inquiry. That same affidavit included documents which had nothing to do with Operation Bricole at all, but which could have revealed to the Keable Commission the existence of another illegal operation which had been carried out in 1973 against the Parti Québécois. The sole reason for doing this was to prevent the Quebec ministry of justice from revealing this fact before the federal McDonald Commission could do so.

But let us at least applaud, for its comic value if for nothing else, the affidavit filed by Fox which tried to prevent the Keable Commission from taking into account the documents which it had already received. That sort of machination amounts to doing just what the Western bloc so often reproaches the Soviet Union for doing: i.e., giving Canada a new “historical reality.”

It's unnerving, I shake when I see that our solicitor-general (or one of his successors) could conceivably give “historically irrefutable” proof that I was not born in Québec on December 10, 1943. For I don't want to die before I have even begun to live...

1. The APLQ Break-In

"In this country, there is a tendency to brush aside, in the name of national security, the rights of the individual."

—from the film: *Les Rosenberg ne doivent pas mourir*
(The Rosenbergs Must Not Die)

Shortly after midnight, a yellow Hertz rent-a-truck silently took its place in the lane behind 3459 St. Hubert Street, at the corner of Cherrier, in Montréal. Detective-Sgt. Marcel Lavoie of the MUCPD (Montréal Urban Community Police Department), who was at the wheel, slumped down in his seat. All was calm, in that residential and commercial corner of the metropolis, on that Saturday morning of October 7, 1972.

Two of the five occupants of the vehicle got out immediately. While Sgt. Claude Brodeur, of the RCMP, furtively parked his unmarked car between two houses, constables Robert Bouchard (of the city police) and Robert Samson (of the RCMP) quickly climbed the outside stairway to the balcony of the two-storey house. They had no trouble lifting the door off its hinges, which in turn sent flying the inside hook and part of the door frame. A second door was unlocked, and opened at the turn of the knob. Bouchard didn't even have to pick the lock.

Three other men, Pierre Champagne, of the QPF (Québec Police Force) and Detective-Sgts. Claude Marcotte and Fernand Tanguay, both of the MUCPD, silently slipped from an idling automobile. Carrying about a dozen blue hockey equipment bags between them, they disappeared into the building behind their accomplices. Sgt. Brodeur used his walkie-talkie to continue surveillance of the immediate surroundings, ready to intervene, should the need arise, on behalf of his colleague Samson.

Silently, by flashlight, the cops-turned-robbers headed for the basement offices of this converted residence. A metal cupboard, its padlock *already* forced and its doors thrown wide, offered its contents to Sgt. Marcotte. The police then methodically searched the other floors, hastily emptying drawers and file-folders into their

hockey bags. Files, bank books, press clippings, addressograph plates, lists of names and addresses were thrown pell-mell into the waiting bags.

Louise Vandelac's desk was given a particularly close search. In fact, they stripped it bare. (Other journalists' desks were not even touched.) The young woman's purse was stolen as well, even though Const. Champagne had inspected it earlier without finding anything in it of interest. The thieves seemed to know what they wanted, and where to find it. The police emerged from the building exactly twenty-two minutes after they had entered it. They were even lugging some filing-cabinet drawers along as part of the haul.

The search had been systematic and orderly. The burglars left not the slightest disorder behind them.

All this while, at both ends of the alley, four men kept watch from two very ordinary cars. Another truck was stationed across from the building being ransacked. Two MUCPD men were crouching inside it, also on look-out duty. For the two preceding days, the surveillance service of the anti-terrorist section of the Montréal police had been spying on every move of visitors and "regulars" alike.

Cpl. Reiter, from his unmarked QPF car, monitored police frequencies on the radio. He was also in contact with the rented truck, Sgt. Brodeur behind the building, Det.-Sgt. Marcotte inside the building, Cpl. Guy Bonsant in RCMP headquarters on St. Catherine Street, the offices of the MUCPD's anti-terrorist section on Hochelaga Street and, finally, with his superior officer, Cpt. Léonce Guérard, in QPF headquarters on Parthenais Street. Reiter, in effect, was choreographer for the entire dance of the robber/cops. Two other city detectives loitered nonchalantly at the nearest bus stop. Constables Jean-Luc Alix and Claude Ménard of the QPF were also keeping watch, armed with their walkie-talkies.

More than a dozen people, in different parts of the city, had been followed since morning by men under the command of Det.-Lt. Marchesseault of the MUCPD. In the Café Campus, a few steps from the University of Montréal, a new and unfamiliar customer took particular interest in Louise Vandelac, who had gone there with some friends from CEGEP Vieux-Montréal*. He did not take his eyes off her all evening.

Meanwhile, Inspector Donald Cobb of the RCMP calmly waited out the hours at home.

With the help of Det.-Sgt. G. Lemire of the MUCPD and Cpl. Richard Presseault of the QPF (who had been waiting in the yellow

* CEGEPs are community colleges in Québec

truck), the burglars quickly loaded about a thousand pounds of paper into the vehicle which, at the blink of a set of headlights, had been gently started up. The car which had been parked at one end of the alley moved aside. The car at the other end scooped up four of the nocturnal visitors, who took care not to slam the doors as they slipped quietly inside.

St. Hubert is an extremely quiet street at night. A patrol car with two officers from city police station 16 (plus two colleagues from the QPF) roamed the area, paying close attention to all incoming calls and standing by to "vacate the area" by quickly intercepting any inconvenient caller or witness. At least 32 other policemen, though, and all other station 16 patrol cars carefully avoided the area, even though it was their duty to act on all calls for help. The second truck disappeared, picking up as it went the watchdogs at the bus stop. Everything had gone as planned.

For the Agence de Presse Libre du Québec, the Movement for the Defence of Political Prisoners of Québec (MDPPQ) and the First of May Moving Co-operative, years of work had just disappeared like snow in the spring-time sun. The losses they had suffered threatened their very existences.

The APLQ had been relieved of about a thousand information files, subscribers' addresses, administrative files, account books, pieces of mail, bank books, cheque books, addressograph plates and even its journalists' personal note-books. Dossiers belonging to the MDPPQ and the First of May Moving Co-operative, whose offices were situated in the basement of the ransacked building, had also been carted away, although the burglars left untouched those of the Union of the Support Staff of CEGEP Vieux-Montréal. Money and equipment were disdainfully left untouched.

As the stolen documentation started its trip to the Hochelaga Street offices of the anti-terrorist section of the MUCPD, members of the security services of the QPF and the MUCPD naïvely congratulated themselves on their contribution to the defence of "national security." They were still under the impression that the raid would allow them to uncover and smash an espionage network which had been set up by Cuba and which operated for the benefit of the entire communist bloc.

The security service of the RCMP swelled discreetly with pleasure. From every point of view, the raid was a major triumph.

First of all, the RCMP had assured itself of the co-operation of the Québec police forces in the execution of a criminal operation (which, in any event, those forces would certainly have discovered during the inevitable “morning-after” investigations). It had been particularly important to involve the MUCPD, because of its jurisdiction in the city.

Furthermore, the Mounties really needed the help of those other police forces, because RCMP manpower was stretched to its limits: not only was the federal election campaign in full swing, but the RCMP was busily preparing another illegal operation of utmost importance and delicacy, this time against the Parti Québécois.

The ploy used by the RCMP to involve the Québec police forces had been the argument that “national security” was in danger. To this end, Robert Samson, the Mountie in charge of watching the activities of the MDPPQ, had convinced his QPF and MUCPD colleagues that a letter from Jacques Cossette-Trudel, the FLQer then in exile in Cuba, was in the APLQ offices. The letter, he said, was addressed to Louise Vandelac, who worked at the agency. Samson insisted that it had been impossible for the RCMP to get its hands on the letter by any of the usual ways — i.e. by intercepting it in the mail, with or without the knowing assistance of the Canadian postal service. He claimed that the letter contained proof that the APLQ was at the centre of a huge international espionage network. He then added, as the clincher, that he knew the combination of the MDPPQ safe. Samson neglected to mention that the “safe” was, in fact, a simple metal locker.

The Québec police thought these claims sufficient justification for a search which they themselves had long wanted to carry out in the premises of the MDPPQ, which had its offices in the same building as the APLQ. The movement, which raised funds to pay legal fees for Québec political prisoners, had been very active ever since the end of the October Crisis of 1970. The movement was also trying to obtain political-prisoner status for the FLQers. There had been a great many demonstrations and court cases in the previous two years, and all these activities had proved a heavy drain on police personnel, especially in the city itself.

So, the letter from Cuba was an excellent lure. It enabled the RCMP to assume the self-effacing position of junior partner in a joint operation whose discoveries would be made available to all three forces. QPF and MUCPD hearts were thumping in noble chests swollen with pride and hope, blissfully unaware of how thoroughly they had been manipulated by the RCMP.

The RCMP officers had known from the beginning that they would be able to pass off Operation Bricole as a joint venture. All