

# CURRENT MAGAZINES

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## THE ESPIONAGE SHOCK IN CANADA

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The Canadian Spy Case—Mr. B. K. Sandwell, in *The Nation*.

A World Made for War—Editorial, in the *New Republic*.

Effects of the Spy Episode—Mr. E. K. Lindley, in *Newsweek*.

The Spy Business—Editorial, in the *Canadian Forum*.

COMPARISON of the two World Wars has been natural and constant. At least for Canadians who were in adult life during the First and who retained their faculties of reflective observation during the Second! They noted much that was the same. Among things different—surprisingly, shockingly different in the Second, for a country which might surely have learned better through experience of the First—has been the espionage horror revealed in the period after close of hostilities. Magazine discussion had no such shameful mystery to probe during the months before the Conference of Versailles in 1919 as has so humiliated and disgusted Canadians awaiting the Peace Conference of 1946.

Cases that are *sub iudice* in the Courts we are of course forbidden to discuss in the press. But, apart from questions about persons, we have quite enough to call for immediate discussion in the statement and the reports from the Royal Commission about perfidious betrayal of the nation's confidence. On certain general conclusions the voice of criticism has been emphatic. On certain other matters the differences of judgment are at least as instructive to watch as the unanimity.

### I.

It is by no means a bad sign of public opinion that it was so slow to accept the report of an extensive spy system corrupting the public service of Canada. Apart from allowance for the sensational exaggerations one always expects as a scandal becomes discussed, people were naturally and creditably reluctant to admit so dark a national disgrace. Public servants in government offices, bound by oath to secrecy in the matters of extreme importance that must be confided to them, were surely like soldiers who had sworn allegiance to the King. So conjecture after conjecture was tried, in order to avoid facing, unless and until one must, so horrible a picture of perfidy. Some irresponsible copyist, on whose innocent simplicity the art of a

foreign secret service agent had played; some indiscreet word dropped at a cocktail party when a cunning operator had chosen the right person to stimulate into talkativeness; some lamentable negligence in a filing system, blameworthy of course, but involving no deliberate bad faith—how much might explanations such as these cover! The press, too, in its love of an exciting story, would be sure to make the most of every detail that could have lurid significance. So with admonitions to us to keep our heads, and apparently supposing that his own article set an example of such high composure, editor after editor refused to believe that the situation was “anything like so bad” as the first reports indicated. Before very long, these wholesomely sanguine people were destined to discover that, on the contrary, it was worse.

What was the motive of those who have stained the public service of Canada with previously unknown disgrace? Perhaps it was done for money. One remembers Falstaff’s impatient question “Thinkest thou I will imperil my immortal soul *gratis*?” Information about the atomic bomb was, no doubt, worth a great deal to the recipient, and those who communicated it might expect a high price for work presumably so distasteful to them as betrayal of their country by breaking their oath. “All values,” says a recent moralist, “are commensurable.” How much it is reasonable to pay, or to demand, in a bargain of this character, can be known only by those who have engaged in such transactions. For most of us, it is a question in spiritual pathology on which we should be ashamed of feeling able to judge.

In the acknowledgments made by some of those accused there was no plea of failure to realize what they were doing. One at least disclosed a motive deeper and more dangerous than the sordid motive of money. The Royal Commission reported avowal by one of the men questioned that he had a “prior loyalty” which set him free, in his own judgment, to disregard his oath to Canada! How far down in the scale of his loyalties is the place for this particular oath, how many earlier but carefully concealed spiritual mortgages he has to meet before honouring this “junior security” of his obligation to the country which trusted his sworn allegiance, he does not seem to have informed the Commissioners in detail. At least they have not told us. But he had said more than enough to set us thinking very hard indeed when the Commission’s Report was made public. Especially as one meets here and there the eager,

vociferous propagandist so plainly resolved to justify somehow not only the U.S.S.R. in whatever it may be doing, but also any agent in this country whose work for the U.S.S.R. has brought him into trouble.

What may we guess to have been the character, and what the object, of the "prior loyalty" which that eminent scientist acknowledged? Since the Moscow press has been so vociferous against the Canadian Government in this whole espionage affair, one's first thought is that service of the Soviet Union must have been the enterprize so sacred (in this zealot's esteem) as to supersede all obligations and to cancel all scruples of origin elsewhere. It is quite credible. Experts in the History of Religions are already confronting, in the passionate cult of Communism, a new and extraordinary caricature of the religious spirit. Readers of Professor Harold Laski's latest book, *Faith, Reason and Civilization*, will remember how that author, somewhat *blasé* in his disillusionment with other spiritual ventures, has conceived a rapturous enthusiasm for the Moscow of 1946 as the shrine in which the great values are preserved. It seems he is being helped out of his despairing mood for mankind by the inspiration of three saints of a new order, the most remarkable trio I should say, both individually and in juxtaposition, that ever mediated saving truth to an anxious enquirer:—Mr. Aldous Huxley, Mr. T. S. Eliot and the late James Joyce! With *Do what you will*, *Ulysses*, and *The Wasteland* as his texts of devotional literature, the convert's further religious evolution will be interesting to watch. Although I much doubt his sustained attachment, with such guides, to his present belief that the Pearl of Great Price is in the Kremlin, I should not be surprised either by the prevalence of such fetichism for a quite considerable period or by the wildness of escapade to which such a cult will prompt others who have not Professor Laski's restraining good sense. Undoubtedly there are those who speak in such radiant spirit of Soviet Russia's mission to reform the whole world, that they might be expected to dare much for her sake. Especially to sacrifice much that they loftily disdain as "minor bourgeois morals". And one cannot help noticing how the so-called "Left-Wing" Party in Canada has, during these last weeks, shown far more concern lest those accused of espionage should be roughly handled than lest their own country should be betrayed. No doubt it was in the service of "Humanity", rather than in that of the U. S. S. R., that the fanatic scientist believed himself to be acting. Like the Puritan warrior

in *John Inglesant*, whose zeal for the Ark of God bade him shoot even an envoy under a flag of truce from the unbelieving host! Would that there had been someone at that scientist's side, to deal as summarily with his mania about the international proletariat as the comrade of "Fight-the-Fight" with a mania for the Reign of the Holy:

By my soul, Master Fight-the-Fight, that passes a joke. The good cause is well enough, and the saints militant and triumphant, and all the rest of it. But to shoot a man under a flag of truce was never yet required of any saint, whether militant or triumphant.

Nor, surely, was it the obligation of a scientist, in any cause whatever, to make use of his country's confidence for its more effective betrayal. But such tactics are familiar enough in the Communist inner circle, under the technical name "boring from within"!

## II.

Slowly the Canadian people awoke to what the espionage disclosures implied. Alas for their early, so charitable conjectures! It turned out that not an inadvertent word dropped under alcoholic stimulation at a party, but a careful scientific document, running to many thousands of words in type, had been a medium for passage of information which the transmitter had sworn to keep secret.

The general irritation which all this aroused seems to have found a certain vent in complaints of the manner in which the Government proceeded. One heard of violation of *Magna Carta*, of disrespect for the *Habeas Corpus Act*, of Canadians being treated by their own Government (on mere suspicion) after a manner suggestive of Fascist or Nazi dictatorship. That executive action was somewhat peremptory, dispensing with certain forms on which in normal times we do well to insist, is plain. But the situation was exceptional indeed. Although there are many details on which we still await the evidence of a judicial hearing, quite enough is already admitted to show that the Canadian Cabinet had to deal with a crisis in which speed was imperative. If at such a time it had proceeded with the routine decorum burlesqued a century ago in *Little Dorrit*, and if traitors had been thus given time to consummate the villainy they were known to have begun, how would the Canadian people have felt towards their hesitating, nerve-

less Government? Another Dickens would have been needed to give adequate expression to their rage:

It was equally impossible to do the plainest right and to undo the plainest wrong without the express authority of the Circumlocution Office. If another Gunpowder Plot had been discovered half an hour before the lighting of the match, nobody would have been justified in saving the parliament until there had been half a score of boards, half a bushel of minutes, several sacks of official memoranda, and a family-vault full of ungrammatical correspondence on the part of the Circumlocution Office.\*

Talk about Hitlerism, about a Canadian Dachau or Buchenwald, about methods of Third Degree torture in questioning suspects, should be too ridiculous even for popular hysteria or for party political propagandism.

It is indeed perfectly true that pretence of a public emergency has been the method of would-be dictators from the days of Peisistratus of Athens. Like those furious assailants of the American "New Deal" who called F. D. Roosevelt a Communist of the type of Lenin, the denouncers of the present Cabinet at Ottawa can easily bethink themselves of some fantastic parallel. But the difference lies in this: very quickly indeed, those using in Ottawa exceptional measures, multiplying their Orders-in-Council or holding suspects *incommunicado*, must show the Canadian people that there was in truth such emergency as justified measures which at a normal time would have been monstrous. *Salus populi suprema lex*. You cannot hold a Government responsible for the public safety unless it is conceded at a time of crisis a certain discretionary power. But quickly it must prove that there *was* such crisis, and that the discretionary trust was not abused. On later review the Government may be shown to have been right or wrong. But it cannot fairly be condemned before its reasons are known. It is entitled to what Coleridge called a certain "experimentative faith."

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An effort to minimize the gravity of the situation was that of writers and speakers who reminded us that espionage is a practice of all Governments, that they all maintain secret service agents abroad, and that the equipment of any foreign Power with a formidable new weapon would make all its rivals exhaust their craft to discover how the thing was made. We

\**Little Dorrit*, Book 1, Chap. 10.

were told many times of the men engaged on such highly confidential work for whom an annual appropriation is made in Great Britain as elsewhere, with a minimum of reference to details of what they are doing: they are on a career of dangerous personal adventure, with the understanding that their activities are undertaken at their own risk, that in the event of trouble they will be officially repudiated, but that their success in uncovering the secret of a foreign Power's strength or weakness will be well rewarded by their national employer. Innumerable novels have set forth the thrill of a profession in which men thus "live dangerously." From the group in parliament always watchful lest Great Britain should get too much credit or Russia too much blame in any international situation, there has come strenuous argument that this time what Russia did was just what Great Britain would have done in the same circumstances.

But it is not Russia's action in this espionage affair that is here our concern. It is the action of Canadians trusted by their country, who have proved capable of combining with foreigners to defeat the national purpose they had sworn to promote. Information which it is altogether legitimate for one party to seek, it may be infamous for another party to communicate. Soviet agents, to whom an employee of the Canadian Government disclosed what he was pledged to keep secret, may well have felt for their wretched tool a contempt like that expressed by Prussian officers in the war of 1870 for Frenchmen who deserted their own colours and took service on the enemy side: "It doesn't matter what uniform a man wears; a scoundrel will always be a scoundrel." At the moment our attention is concentrated on the Canadian miscreants, though there is a further problem—by no means trivial—as to the character of those methods by which any Power may pry into the secrets of another Power's defence equipment without straining too far their friendly relations. Purposes quite proper in themselves must be furthered within certain limits upon the means used. Mr. Bernard Shaw once put this general truth with his usual gift of unforgettable illustration. No doubt, he said, it would be interesting to learn how a human body would behave at a temperature of two hundred degrees Fahrenheit, "but a scientist is not permitted to put his grandmother in the stove in order to find out." The continuous flow of rhetoric, then, about secret service being universal, with examples drawn in part from budget appropriations by the British parliament and in part from the novels of Phillips Oppenheim or Le Quœux, is

simply irrelevant to the point at issue for Canadians about means of protection for the future against treacherous civil servants.

### III

A Canadian M.P. raised in debate on this subject a question surely pertinent. He asked whether, in appointment to highly responsible public positions, no means were taken to estimate the trustworthiness of candidates. Was it possible that usefulness in political party strife, recommendation from managers of "the machine" and controllers of the accompanying "patronage," was so effective as to make Canada now exemplify Carlyle's complaint—that office goes not to those ablest to discharge its duties, but to those ablest to be appointed? Anyhow, the record showing Canadian civil servants as men or women with prior loyalty to a Power other than Canada is enough to prompt scrutiny of our method of personnel selection.

In the country for which these remarkable young Canadians have been so zealous as to dishonor their oaths for its sake, there would, we know, be a short and easy method with any who had acted there in like fashion. A Russian "Purge" is decidedly quicker and more drastic than our way of proceeding: not even our recent accelerations, which have so shocked good people by their disregard of *Magna Carta* and *Habeas Corpus*, could make it rival what is known in the U.S.S.R. as "Liquidation." No one here wants to see anything like the indiscriminating sweep with which the now dominant section of the 1917 Russian Revolutionaries made an end of that other section of the same party unwilling for the 1935 revision of the original revolutionary creed. But it does not surely follow that no means should be taken, after our recent appalling evidence of treachery in official quarters, either to ascertain how far this leaven has gone or to provide a more reliable method of choosing men and women for strategic posts.

Everyone who followed with attention and now remembers with vividness the propagands among Canadian youth during the "twenty-years truce" will realize how much was done, with little effort at counteracting it, towards formation in ingenuous minds of the very spirit of sceptical unconcern for their country on which the secret service agent of a foreign Power might most hopefully work. What could better prepare the way for such an agent than the diffusion of those ideas on which "Isolationism" rests? Such ideas, I mean, as that of all international relation-

ship as one of struggle for power, of complete absence of concern for justice as a motive, and of the alleged moral superiority of one nation's cause over that of another as a mere delusion of the simpleminded. One remembers the effort made, happily in vain, by agitators of this type to secure an announcement from the Canadian parliament that never again, for any cause whatever, would Canada send an expeditionary force overseas. Canadian youth for the most part turned instinctively in disgust from their degrading account of mankind. But it would be too much to suppose that it did not penetrate and determine some minds, and in so far as it did, there was here obviously the soil on which the agent of a foreign Government might best drop a seed. If there is no fundamental difference between the cause of one nation and that of another, if all national claims to regard for justice are but specious disguises by which the real purpose of greed may be served, why disregard the opportunity of a handsome personal reward for promoting an interest at least as worthy as any other?

For readers of a REVIEW such as this, with special interest in our institutions of learning, it must have been painful to observe the number of University men whose names have figured in the espionage trials. A very small percentage, it is at once pointed out, of the University population, and redeemed a thousand times by the vast numbers of University volunteering! Besides, who knows how many of the accused will turn out innocent? One certainly hopes for the best from the cases still to be tried. But excuse it as one will, here is a humiliating spectacle. Who can read without a sense of shame about the English scientist taken into custody by police at the close of his lecture in a London college, and found guilty of treacheries on such a scale as to incur a sentence of ten years penal servitude? Shameful, too, for all to whom the good name of Universities is dear, must have been the announcement of fatuous resolutions by a scientific group here and there, arguing apparently in the name of "academic freedom" for the right of an investigator to diffuse as he pleases information which he has sworn to keep secret! One remembers the plea for a certain British *savant* in the First World War, whose foible was his anti-patriotism, that he was "a man of European reputation," and the apt reply from the Prince Minister, justifying his imprisonment, that if he had wronged his country, his widespread reputation should be held to aggravate rather than to mitigate the offence. Such cases are unpleasant support for Kipling's satire on "brittle intellectuals who snap beneath a strain."



During recent months, here and there, I have attended those ceremonies marking the close of a College year to which, with conspicuous infelicity, the name "Commencement" has been applied. They often present a graceful sight, faultless in the routine of an ancient liturgy, suggestive even yet of ideals of culture—despite the abuses to which their historic symbolism is so often debased. As I watched one of those academic processions on the day after I had read column after column of sickening evidence against University teachers on trial for betrayal of their country, I wondered whether anyone of that impressive group had an appointment for the same evening, at a point selected for its obscurity, with the secret service agent of a foreign Power. It was hard to believe that such a thing could be. And yet a British Court had recorded a verdict of guilty against an academic scientist of high repute who had not long before been at work in a Canadian laboratory. The police had waited on him at the close of his lecture: his arrest and trial had led to a sentence of ten years penal servitude, and it would be no more surprising if a heavy police hand should fall on the shoulder of some richly caparisoned Ph. D. or D. Sc. among those whose evolutions I had watched at "Commencement." Would the newspapers next day announce that such an one had been arrested even as he withdrew, after his part in the academic ritual, to exchange his gorgeous uniform for a serviceable disguise?

A passage by Anatole France kept ringing that day in my ear. It is the passage from *M. Bergeret à Paris*, in which he speaks of the incredulity with which the French public first heard in the disclosures of *L'affaire Dreyfus* about officers of high rank concocting forgeries to ruin an innocent man. Who could believe such a thing, of soldiers so distinguished?

The officers who rode past on horseback with their swords in their hands, amid the glitter of gold and steel, to the sound of music and the roll of drums—how was it possible to believe that they would shortly be bending over a table, behind closed doors, *tête-à-tête* with anxious agents from the prefecture of police, handling the eraser and the india-rubber, handling the gum-brush or sprinkling pounce, scratching out or putting in a name in a document, forging handwriting to ruin an innocent man, or thinking out ridiculous disguises for mysterious appointments with the traitor they had to save?

In like indignant mood one wanted to repel the foul insinuation that any *savant* of the grand ceremonial passing before one's

eyes might have a "cover name" by which to be known in transactions with the secret service agent of a Power highly dangerous to his country. One thought of the Phillips Oppenheim machinery—codes, false whiskers, assignations at unlikely spots, strategy of identification and all the rest that had diverted the novel-reader's fancy in many an idle hour. And then, with a start of horror, one realized how it had actually been going on, not far away, with the chief actor a highly distinguished scientist, as attested by trial, conviction and sentence at a British High Court!

In a period of the world's affairs when shock after shock had at length produced a mood ready for any news of further moral collapse, we should no doubt have been prepared for a surprise even so disagreeable as this one. The vital question is how to prevent so far as possible its recurrence. If it has wakened us up to currents of peril which most of us had not suspected, even this experience of national shame will have been worth enduring.

H. L. S.