

Hannant, Larry. *The Infernal Machine: Investigating the Loyalty of Canadian Citizens*. Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1995.

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Most countries employ a variety of data to conduct effectively the business of state. Some of this information will be classified, "protected" or "sensitive." The incredibly competitive information age means some data is kept from those whose interests do not reflect the interests, goals or objectives of that state. It is protected by a variety of means, including physical and electronic security and, of a more intangible and exploitable nature, personnel security. It is this arm of the security mosaic that the author, an historian and journalist, examines in *The Infernal Machine*.

Although a somewhat dry and tedious book, it nevertheless describes a vital part of the security process, that is the means by which a state - in this case, Canada - assesses the loyalty of its citizens as a datum from which to grant or deny a security clearance and thus access to sensitive or classified information. *The Infernal Machine* is essentially about the security screening *process* (i.e., the sources and methods security agencies use to assess citizens' loyalty) and how that process impacts on the lives of the people being assessed or investigated. As Hannant correctly points out, the security-screening process has not been the subject of much scholarly attention. Though it seems excessive to stress that "[s]ecurity intelligence lacks the common touch," there is no doubt that the *process* by which people are granted access to sensitive data does not receive the attention that perhaps it should. In particular, assessing individuals' loyalty is an emotive issue given that it deals with intangibles: how can a state quantify or apply realistic scientific methods to assess loyalty and be reasonably assured that the results are accurate and validated?

The Infernal Machine has five key themes: first, it explains the evolution of motives and methods for investigating citizens' loyalty; second, it describes the creation of Canada's security-screening system; third, it explores the security intelligence relationships and connection between Canada, Britain and the US, a relationship which helped to shape the security system in Canada; fourth, it fits security screening into a technical context; and finally, it probes the reaction of Canadians to the emergence of a new means of "state surveillance." By this approach, Hannant challenges the conventional view that security screening in Canada commenced in 1945 (according to contemporary accounts). Although it could be argued that an official security-screening system was not in place until 1945, other means of assessing and testing the loyalty of employees and civil servants were, indeed, operating prior to that time. It is while pursuing this third objective that Hannant provides the background from where he derives his title of "infernal machine." To help speed the process of fingerprint identification, the RCMP employed IBM tabulating equipment. This equipment greatly assisted the RCMP in reducing human error whilst improving the speed and accuracy of collecting and filing fingerprint records. Furthermore, it formed a central part of the RCMP security-screening program, which was based almost entirely on fingerprint records. Herein lies the rub: in order for a company or government department to allow employees or servicemen access to sensitive or classified information, their "file" was checked against RCMP fingerprint records to determine whether or not the applicant had a criminal record. Not surprisingly,

the issue of fingerprinting was a sensitive one, always associated with those who *had* a record. As the Harris government in Ontario has discovered, this sensitivity persists to this day and is a recurring theme throughout the book.

The chapter dealing with liaison with the UK and US is interesting, particularly because of the section dealing with inter-governmental relations and exchange between the federal and provincial governments. Ontario and Quebec had the largest stake in this process, though each province had its own reasons for cooperating with the RCMP. This is specially noticeable when other federal and provincial agencies struggled with the means to deal with internal dissent. Again, this is a recurring theme, as Hannant tends to apply the mores of the 1990s to either wartime situations or the communist scares of the late 1920s and early 1930s.

Where Hannant's book departs from previous work in this chapter is his focus on the exchange and discussion about sources and methods. Many works describe how CAN-UK-US all-source intelligence was exchanged during World War II and into the Cold War. This book, however, focuses not so much on the intelligence product (i.e., whether Bloggins was a COMINTERN agent), but the *process* by which a state security organ arrived at that conclusion. While intelligence exchange carries its risks, sources and methods can be even more risky than the data itself.

Hannant's final two chapters seek to assess the impact of Canada's security-screening system on its citizens, and arrive at a conclusion. Chapter 9, entitled "The first to come under suspicion: Popular Response to Security Screening," discusses the impact such security screening has on those who are screened. Clearly, there were some errors, where people were denied a clearance - and employment as a result, and no doubt others received access to material they shouldn't have. Nevertheless, the system - with all its warts - was, in the main, a solid one. In this chapter, it is often difficult to discern the objective historian who allows the reader to assess the facts for themselves from the investigative journalist ever at the ready to provide an opinion. If, as Hannant claims, that screening of civil servants commenced in 1931, it is doubtful to claim that in 1941 security reports on individuals which "see the light of day through error," were the result of the state's "still-primitive understanding of how to handle sensitive intelligence." It is not lack of knowledge on the part of the state as a whole, but people who, for one reason or another, don't follow procedures correctly or protect such information correctly. As history has shown, other countries whose security and intelligence organs have not suffered from Canada's "cryptographic innocence" or intelligence naïveté have endured significant blunders causing deep penetration agents to be killed.

Hannant's civil libertarian streak comes alive in the latter part of the chapter. He states that "[o]ne of the puzzling aspects of wartime security screening and fingerprinting was that it was never actively challenged by most Canadians. Although many . . . objected to the expansion of fingerprinting, the wartime programme generated no serious opposition from the population as a whole." (p. 219) It seems odd that one would have to offer as an explanation wartime circumstances, particularly as the government recognized, and was reported in the *Globe and Mail* of the time, that suspending "certain . . . Liberties

temporarily in order that all . . . liberties might be preserved." (Globe and Mail, 14 May 1940, p. 4) Clearly, while there were abuses, the infringements of such liberties were, in the wider context, acceptable risks. There is an underlying tone which seems to compare the relatively minor problems with a monolithic McCarthyist government program.

Nonetheless, *The Infernal Machine* discusses a rare arena in the security intelligence world: the *process* of security screening. It is marred by a libertarian's bias, and applying the mores of the 1990s to circumstances and a society that were vastly different than the Canada we know now. As the twenty-first century approaches, perhaps the focus of studies of this nature should shift from continually haranguing the government to large multi-national corporations, whose intrusiveness into employees' personal lives can be even greater than that of their governments.

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