

**Frost, Mike with Michel Gratton. *Spyworld: Inside the Canadian and American Intelligence Establishments*. Toronto: Doubleday, 1994.**

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**Frost, Mike with Michel Gratton. *Spyworld: Inside the Canadian and American Intelligence Establishments*. Toronto: Doubleday, 1994.**

As the Cold War came to a close and the twenty-first century loomed nearer, many governments scrutinized their intelligence agencies to ascertain their continued relevance in the post-Cold War era. Among them are organizations such as the Canadian Security Intelligence Service (CSIS) and the Communications Security Establishment (CSE). It could be said that many Canadians be they in or out of government do not know very much about CSE, being concerned about other matters in their lives. Until recently, little had been written about CSE or its antecedents by former employees. That said, there is a considerable amount of information about CSE readily available for those who might like to look, including an Internet Home Page. Even with this openness, however, much remains hidden often for very good reasons.

The principal author, Mike Frost, retired from CSE in 1990. He joined the Royal Canadian Navy, and served as a Radioman Special, as well as the Canadian Forces Supplementary Radio System the collection arm of CSE prior to joining CSE. Michel Gratton was former Prime Minister Mulroney's press secretary and is a parliamentary columnist for the *Toronto Sun*. In addition, he is author of *So, What are the Boys Saying?* He freely admits that despite his PMO contacts and close working with the machinery of government, he "didn't have a clue what CSE really was." One gets the impression that he felt he *should* have known merely because he belonged to the PMO. This aspect of need to know is clearly what troubles journalists such as Gratton, who seem to think that the public has the right to know absolutely everything.

While providing an interesting inside "look" at CSE, *Spyworld* appears to be more of a catharsis for its authors, as they lay some demons to rest. It is also readily apparent that both authors have an axe to grind against the "establishment" and do so frequently throughout *Spyworld's* pages. The anti-establishment tenor of the book detracts from its message and the information, however damaging, Frost wishes to convey. One also doubts Frost's claimed altruistic motives for telling his story.

What can one make of this book? On the positive side, there are interesting passages about the inside workings of CSE and certain aspects of its operations. It is, however, in many other respects, disappointing. Far too often, conclusions are extrapolated from little or no firm knowledge. Moreover, statements such as "[a]lthough Frost has never been inside GRANNY, he suspects [the security arrangements] function on the same system [as other parts of CSE]." (p. 40) Such comments are insufficiently corroborated. For example, the *avant propos* makes a rather tenuous link between the activities of the RCMP and CSE. To the uninitiated eye, "security intelligence" and the "intelligence community" could be construed as one and the same. The concerns about reforms and controls for the "*security intelligence*" (emphasis added) agency and the RCMP are not applicable to CSE, which has no internal mandate. Although there is *potential* for abuse (as is the case for other occupations such as journalism) it does not mean *ipso facto* that while one arm of Canada's intelligence agencies went beyond its mandate, they all did. Moreover, to wrap the McDonald Commission flag around CSE is unconvincing. The

authors also claim the government has never revealed publicly CSE's mandate; however, it is explicitly described in the Security Intelligence Review Committee's 1987-88 *Annual Report* as well as the CSE Home Page. Clearly, unsubstantiated comments and innuendo do not bolster Frost's arguments and allegations.

For his part, Gratton clearly hasn't grasped what "need to know" and "must know" really mean. Because he was the PM's press secretary doesn't mean he had the *right* to know any or all aspects of CSE operations. One must remember just what a press secretary does and that it was for the benefit of protecting the source that he was not aware. Ironically, these same journalists frequently trumpet the need for "source protection."

It is highly likely that some of Frost's revelations damaged CSE's operations. That said, his book suffers from a credibility gap because of the innuendos, false truths, and sarcastic remarks that pervade it. Perhaps one potentially positive outcome of his book as well as recent revelations by a former analyst<sup>1</sup> is that CSE oversight will take place. One must not, however, rush to the conclusion that the aim of oversight is to examine the need for signals intelligence or SIGINT agencies and SIGINT collection, rather than ensuring that CSE produces the best, relevant, products for the government. The end of the Cold War does not *ipso facto* mean the end of history; or the end of intelligence, of which SIGINT is a part. Readers may have been allowed a small peak into CSE, but a better-written, less cloudy mosaic is required. Lack of knowledge about CSE is not due to secrecy (as Frost alleges) but to lack of interest on the part of Canadians. Frost expresses the hope that his book will assist Canadians to decide whether or not CSE is "worth it or not." Perhaps a more accountable CSE will emerge, but it would be unwise to employ solely *Spyworld* as a benchmark from which to commence this examination.

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### **Endnotes**

1. See "Ex-agent: We spy on allies," *The Victoria Times-Colonist*, 13 November 1995, p. A3.