

Book Reviews

Mitrovica, Andrew. *Covert Entry: Spies, Lies and Crimes Inside Canada's Secret Service*. Toronto: Random House Canada, 2002.

Since the establishment of the Canadian Security Intelligence Service (CSIS) in 1984, opportunities for Canadians to get a glimpse of the inner workings of our domestic secret service have been few and far between. The literature on the topic remains scarce and the release of Andrew Mitrovica's *Covert Entry* triggered high hopes of seeing a contemporary, in-depth look into CSIS activities finally reaching the shelves of our bookstores and libraries. However, what *The Globe and Mail* investigative journalist delivers is interesting at best, and disappointing in many ways.

Covert Entry is about John J. Farrell and his involvement in CSIS operations and activities. The book starts by briefly addressing Farrell's tough childhood, as well as his first jobs as security guard and prison warden. Despite poor academic results and an early-earned criminal record, Farrell's drive and ambition convinced one of Canada Post's Managers for Security and Investigation Services to hire him as a Postal Inspector at the age of 21. Finally, after about two years spent with Canada Post, Farrell was "borrowed" by CSIS in the capacity of an Auxiliary Postal Inspector.

The core of Mitrovica's book describes the day-to-day activities of Farrell, including the role he played in the mail interception operation directed against union activists at Canada Post. (pp. 60-75)¹ In 1994, while working on a criminology degree to become a full-time intelligence officer, Farrell was brought into the CSIS' Special Operational Services (SOS). Mitrovica describes in great detail the operations in which Farrell took part, from the sometimes tricky mail interception programme code-named OPERATION VULVA (sic) (pp. 86-281) to the high-profile surveillance OPERATION STANLEY CUP directed against two Russian agents of the Foreign Intelligence Service (SVR). (pp. 173-197) While the author goes into interesting operational details, he focuses more on the countless, quite serious security lapses that Farrell noted during his involvement in CSIS operations.

The description of Farrell's activities also allows the reader to get a glimpse into the methods and gadgets used for CSIS operations, whether it is screening garbage (pp. 46 and 65), intercepting and opening private mail (pp. 84 and 85), setting up front companies (p. 163), breaking in apartments (pp. 194 and 205), loading a car with listening and tracking devices (p. 207), or stealing a Crown key to open relay boxes, mailboxes, and apartment panels. (p. 207) But the reader also gets plenty of details about what Farrell perceives to be goofs, hard-to-believe security breaches, amateurish handling of operations, and abuses of CSIS' goods and moneys by intelligence officers.

The last part of Mitrovica's book describes how Farrell, in 1997, slowly but surely started to be pushed aside from CSIS operations, finally leading to his "divorce" with the Service

in 1998. Throughout the book, we get to understand the importance of money to Farrell and consequently why, as his involvement in secret intelligence started to decline, he invested so much energy in trying to get financial compensation for his unpaid overtime work and his employment termination. He even exchanged correspondence with CSIS Director Ward Elcock, telling him about all the unlawful activities he had been part of in the name of national security - but to no avail. CSIS stood firm on its argument that Farrell had never been a CSIS employee because all through these years Farrell remained officially attached to and paid by Canada Post. On 6 December 2002, after the book was published, Justice MacKay of the Federal Court sided with CSIS and dismissed Farrell's court action on the premise that, according to the law, only individuals appointed directly by the Director of CSIS can become CSIS employees (decision T-1726-01).² Therefore, since he had not been formally appointed by the Director, Farrell's only employment link was with Canada Post.

After reading the book, one might feel sympathy for a young man who dedicated many years of his life, broke the law, and took risks for the benefit of CSIS, and who is only asking fair compensation for his dedication. But this is not the complete picture. Indeed, right from the outset, Mitrovica - who once said that "the press in Canada is the only intelligence agency that is accountable before the public" - clearly states his bias, and all through the book, we only get to read about the "good little boy" outraged by the actions of the "evil government agency." This one-sided view greatly undermines the credibility of the book as the reader perceives Farrell's story as the personal vendetta of a bitter young man. In addition, Mitrovica focuses on a very limited area of CSIS operations and he seems to leave aside the fundamental premise that a secret service has to act covertly and sometimes on the edge of the law to be effective. This book is not about Canadian intelligence but rather about how amazing Farrell is and how disastrous CSIS is. Still, it gives invaluable access to the details of some CSIS contemporary operations and to the way things get done in the field. But one should not forget that after all, this book is about a bitter, angry former CSIS informant who seems to have nothing to lose by telling "his truth" to a well-known journalist.

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Endnotes

1. See CSIS, "Allegations that CSIS is spying on postal workers," *News Release*, 11 July 2000; and Jeff Sallot and Andrew Mitrovica, "Postal union threatens lawsuit to halt spying," *The Globe and Mail*, 12 July 2000.

2. Available at <http://decisions.fct-cf.gc.ca/fct/2002/2002fct1271.html>.