

## Spying on the Young in Depression and War: Students, Youth Groups and the RCMP 1935-1942

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Article abstract

Focusing on the experiences of the Canadian Student Assembly and the Canadian Youth Congress, this article examines the ways in which the RCMP assembled information, conducted surveillance, and interpreted the activities of student and youth "radicals" from the early 1930s to the beginning of World War II. Sources for this study include surveillance and security reports filed by RCMP informants and authorities. As well as exploring new terrain in the history of youth and higher education in Canada, this study adds to the literature on the means by which liberal democratic practices were fettered by government authorities in the depression and war years.

# Spying on the Young in Depression and War: Students, Youth Groups and the RCMP, 1935-1942

Paul Axelrod

AS ONE OF THE WORLD'S better known liberal democracies, Canada might well gloat at the extent of political freedom enjoyed by its residents throughout most of the country's history. Yet, as several historians have proven, this freedom has been far from absolute. From the beginning of World War I to the end of World War II, the Canadian government invested itself with "quasi-totalitarian" powers, and on many occasions, chose to exercise them.<sup>1</sup>

Under the authority of edicts such as the War Measures Act, Section 98 of the Criminal Code, and the Defence of Canada Regulations, private businesses and residences were raided, newspapers were shut down, organizations were banned, citizens were arrested and interned without trial, and "foreigners" were deported. Acting largely on reports and recommendations from the Royal Canadian Mounted Police, the government applied these policies in the name of combatting political "subversion" on the domestic front. During the Depression those identified as "Communist" or those deemed dangerous (non-Communist) leftists were the main

<sup>1</sup>Reg Whitaker, "Official Repression of Communism During World War II," *Labour/Le Travail*, 17 (Spring 1986), 135. See also Ramsay Cook, "Canadian Freedom in Wartime," in W.H. Heick and Roger Graham, eds., *His Own Man: Essays in Honour of A.R.M. Lower* (Montréal 1974), 37-53; Lita Rose Betcherman, *The Little Band* (Ottawa 1983); Ann Gomer Sunahara, *The Politics of Racism* (Toronto 1981); Gregory S. Kealey, "State Repression of Labour and the Left in Canada, 1914-1920: The Impact of the First World War," *Canadian Historical Review*, 73, 3 (September 1992), 281-314; Barbara Roberts, "Shovelling out the 'Mutinous': Political Deportation from Canada before 1936," *Labour/Le Travail*, 18 (Fall 1986), 77-110.

targets of police surveillance. Once the war began, suspected fascists and other "enemy aliens" were also pursued by authorities.<sup>2</sup>

Universities, students, and youth groups were not immune from the extraordinary exercise of state and police power. Though only a small proportion of young people in Canada joined left-leaning movements for social change during the 1930s, those who did elicited considerable RCMP interest.<sup>3</sup> From its founding in 1935 to its forced dispersal in 1942, the Canadian Youth Congress (CYC) and its affiliated local councils were closely watched by the RCMP, as was the Canadian Student Assembly (CSA) which functioned from January 1938 to early 1940 before succumbing to internal conflict.

Focusing on these two groups, this article examines the ways in which the RCMP assembled information, conducted surveillance, and interpreted the activities of student and youth "radicals" from the early 1930s to the beginning of World War II. The primary sources for this study are RCMP surveillance and security reports obtained from the Canadian Security Intelligence Service through the Access to Information Act. Most individual names, as is current CSIS practice, were excised from these documents before they were released. Instead, the reports detail and assess the organizational activities of the CSA and the CYC. As well as exploring new terrain in the history of youth and higher education in Canada, the analysis which follows is intended to provide further insights into the means by which liberal democratic practices were fettered by government authorities in the 1930s and early 1940s.

## I

"THE VIRUS OF COMMUNISM, long coursing, almost unopposed, in our social blood-stream has now reached the heart of our educational system as represented by undergraduates and even college professors in our leading universities."<sup>4</sup> So proclaimed an editorial in the RCMP's *Intelligence Bulletin* on 12 February 1940. This was an extreme and provably inaccurate statement contradicted by the RCMP's own surveillance reports. Though communists were surely to be found in some

<sup>2</sup>Whitaker, "Official Repression"; Gregory S. Kealey and Reg Whitaker, eds., *R.C.M.P. Security Bulletins: The War Series, 1939-1941*, Volume 1, (St. John's 1989); *Commission of Inquiry Concerning Certain Activities of the Royal Canadian Mounted Police, Third Report, Freedom and Security Under the Law* (Ottawa 1981), 59.

<sup>3</sup>For a discussion of student politics in the Depression, which estimates that a maximum of five per cent of Canadian university students participated in such organizations, see Paul Axelrod, "The Student Movement of the 1930s," in Paul Axelrod and John G. Reid, eds., *Youth, University, and Canadian Society: Essays in the Social History of Higher Education* (Montréal 1989), 216-46.

<sup>4</sup>*Intelligence Bulletin*, 12 February 1940, reprinted in Gregory Kealey and Reg Whitaker, eds., *RCMP Security Bulletins: The War Series, 1939-1941*, 140. The *Intelligence Bulletin* was produced by the Intelligence Section of the RCMP and distributed to the offices of the Prime Minister and other senior government officials.

university-based organizations, they were a tiny minority and had been so throughout the 1930s. Some Canadians may have genuinely believed in the danger posed to the university by the communist movement, while others, including certain politicians and police officials, strategically chose to exaggerate its political impact. In the wake of the Depression and in the midst of war, the prospect of widespread dissent troubled those who governed, which explains, in part, the draconian terms of the 1939 Defence of Canada Regulations. Through this act, the federal government assumed full powers of censorship over the press, gained the right to detain anyone considered likely to threaten the "safety of the state", and had the authority to outlaw organizations deemed "subversive."<sup>5</sup> Linking the dreaded "contagion" of communism with the activities of peace activists, union organizers, civil libertarians, and educational reformers served to discredit these campaigners and contain their influence. As Reg Whitaker has concluded, "There is ample evidence that many, although not all, leading public officials shared in the equation of subversion and treason with the left rather than the right, even when the war was against fascism."<sup>6</sup>

Though formally non-partisan in its policing role, the RCMP was ideologically well to the right during the 1930s and early 40s. Its surveillance activities targeted confirmed and suspected leftists, not only known communists and organizations in which communists had an important role, but also groups and individuals associated with causes that communists supported. Since communists endorsed a number of non-revolutionary reforms — from financial assistance for students to employment programs for youth — the surveillance net was, indeed, broadly cast. It was in this context that the activities of professors, students, and youth groups were observed and assessed.

The reports on campus life which were prepared by RCMP informants, processed and interpreted by area officers, conveyed to the RCMP Commissioner, and selectively forwarded to the federal Minister of Justice, were of mixed quality in substance and tone. Some were simply erroneous: organizational activities and histories were inaccurately presented. Some were steeped in frenzied anti-communism. Others, though, were quietly descriptive and usefully corrective, laying to rest, at least within police circles, the myth of impending revolutionary insurgency within Canadian universities.

For example, during the 1930s, McGill University was frequently criticized by "concerned" citizens for harbouring, if not promoting, communist activism. One such allegation came in 1931 from Baron Eugene Fersen who wrote that "McGill University is contaminated with [Communist] ideas." In response, RCMP Inspector J.W. Phillips wrote to the Commissioner that it "is ridiculous to think of the

<sup>5</sup>Whitaker, "Official Repression," 138; Cook, "Canadian Freedom in Wartime, 1939-1945," 38-40.

<sup>6</sup>Whitaker, "Official Repression," 137.

University as a hot-bed of Communism.”<sup>7</sup> Similarly, in 1936, Lieutenant J. Ennis, head of the Montréal Police Department’s “Red Squad”, which scrutinized student meetings, concluded “there is no Red Menace of any description at McGill.” At best some students were interested in Communism “in an intellectual way only and discuss it much the same as they would any topic of an educational nature.”<sup>8</sup>

Another suspect group, the McGill Labour Club, which attracted several social democrats, was also discovered upon investigation to be far from menacing. Its membership was slight and it was at odds with Montréal communists. According to one surveillance report, “The McGill students [in the McGill Labour Club] probably never exceeded six in number and soon held themselves aloof from general meetings of the communist party in Montreal.”<sup>9</sup> Despite such testimony to the political tranquillity of the campus, the RCMP remained vigilant in its surveillance of McGill students and faculty. The speeches and travels of David Lewis, a socialist student and head of the McGill Labour Club, were closely monitored as were those of a young lecturer, Eugene Forsey, an important figure in the non-communist League for Social Reconstruction.<sup>10</sup> Indeed, because of their irreverent and critical content, the *Alarm Clock*, a publication of the McGill Labour Club and the *Black Sheep*, a magazine which, according to McGill Principal, General Sir Arthur Currie, “was a criticism of everything” were banned from the campus by university officials in 1933.<sup>11</sup> Sharing a commitment to keeping the campus politically quiescent, particularly in light of public complaints (however unfounded), Currie and the RCMP carried on a regular correspondence on the activities of McGill students and faculty throughout the 1930s. As General J.H.B. MacBrien, Commissioner of the RCMP, told Currie in 1933, “I am quite satisfied that you are doing all that is possible at McGill to assist in the control of Communism.”<sup>12</sup> He looked for similar cooperation at other universities. “It would be a big help if the University Authorities would control the public actions of some of their professors ...”<sup>13</sup>

<sup>7</sup>*Montreal Gazette*, 1 May 1931; J.W. Phillips to Commissioner Cortlandt Starnes, 9 May 1931; Cortlandt Starnes to Arthur Currie, 13 May 1931, Canadian Security Intelligence Service (CSIS) Files. All subsequent correspondence, unpublished reports, and newspaper clippings are drawn from CSIS files unless otherwise indicated.

<sup>8</sup>*Montreal Standard*, 18 April 1936.

<sup>9</sup>Cortlandt Starnes to Arthur Currie, 13 May 1931, CSIS Accession #, 85-A-88.

<sup>10</sup>Report on Lewis speech followed his trip to Russia, 16 May 1931; Forsey speech 14 January 1932, 85-A-88. See also Michiel Horn, *The League for Social Reconstruction: Intellectual Origins of the Democratic Left in Canada, 1930-1942* (Toronto 1980).

<sup>11</sup>Arthur Currie to J.H.B. MacBrien, Commissioner of the RCMP, 11 February 1933, 85-A-88.

<sup>12</sup>MacBrien to Currie, 13 February 1933, 85-A-88.

<sup>13</sup>*Ibid.*

## II

FEW CAMPUS ORGANIZATIONS attracted as much RCMP interest as did the Canadian Student Assembly. Founded in January 1938 following a national student conference in Winnipeg, which had been organized by the Student Christian Movement, the CSA sought to represent student interests assertively on a wide range of educational and social issues. It opposed militarism, and favoured greater educational opportunity, closer relations between French and English Canada, and the preservation of civil liberties. As a participant in the peace movement, and a proponent of greater state activism in the nation's economic and social life, the CSA shared the ideological perspectives of other left-leaning, reform-oriented organizations. In the midst of depression and amid growing international tensions, it hoped to inspire student involvement in domestic and world affairs.<sup>14</sup> It also presented itself as an organizational alternative to the National Federation of Canadian University Students, a service association which had been in existence since 1926. Because of its modest program and inoffensive activities, NFCUS was, from the perspective of university authorities and the RCMP, beyond suspicion. A 1939 RCMP surveillance report described it as a "reliable and approved institution."<sup>15</sup> The same could not be said of the Canadian Student Assembly, though initially, the RCMP was somewhat befuddled by the organization's endeavours. In late 1938 the CSA mounted a campaign to lobby the federal government to provide a program of national scholarships for university students. The campaign was to culminate in a trip to Ottawa in March 1939 by a "mass delegation" determined to meet with the federal cabinet. CSA enthusiasts mounted support and raised money on university campuses for this venture.

Until news of the planned visit to Ottawa was published in the press in February 1939, the RCMP knew virtually nothing about the Canadian Student Assembly, and it scrambled to fill the information gap. Based on a report of a "confidential contact" at the University of Toronto, Assistant Commissioner Tait was informed by the RCMP's Toronto detachment that the planned excursion to Ottawa had "not been taken at all seriously by the majority of students" and was likely to fail.<sup>16</sup> Similar reports were initially filed from Montréal where fund raising was said to be going badly at McGill University.<sup>17</sup>

<sup>14</sup>A statement of the CSA's policies can be found in the report of the CSA's Third National Conference in December 1939, included in correspondence from Grante Lathe (CSA National Secretary) to Delegate(s), 9 January 1940. This material is contained in report from V.A.M. Kemp, Superintendent Commanding "O" Division, to the Commissioner, 26 January 1940, 85-A-88. See also Axelrod, "The Student Movement of the 1930s."

<sup>15</sup>Memo prepared by H.A.R. Gagnon, Superintendent Commanding "C" Division, 24 March 1939, 85-A-88.

<sup>16</sup>W.H. Kirkpatrick to D.C.I. Tait, 24 February 1939, 85-A-88.

<sup>17</sup>A. Lamothe to the Superintendent Commanding "C" Division, 2 March 1939, 85-A-88.

Several days later, on the eve of the Ottawa trip, new surveillance reports indicated that the RCMP had "apparently been misinformed."<sup>18</sup> Both the Montréal and Toronto delegations were expected to be large, and some 175 students in total were supposed to arrive in Ottawa from across the country. Evidently, 140 actually did. Support for the scholarship campaign was now found to be broad, and included that of notable Canadians such as Sir Frederick Banting of the University of Toronto, as well as the editorial writers of the *Montreal Star*.<sup>19</sup>

Attempting to account for the poor intelligence, H.W. Kirkpatrick of the Toronto detachment explained: "due to my contact at the U of T taking examinations he has had very little time to make enquiries and at present the Communists in this movement in Toronto are not known. Every effort through other sources is being made to get accurate information and anything bearing on this matter will be immediately reported."<sup>20</sup> By 10 March, the representatives of the Toronto Branch of the CSA had been identified, as were the delegates who met with Labour Minister Norman Rogers in Ottawa. Still, by 25 March, according to a memo, "very careful inquiries have failed to produce any information about the Canadian Students Assembly except as follows ..." The brief then included a short and partially accurate description of the organization's origins and contained this warning: "Owing to the loose nature of this body it is easy for irresponsible parties to initiate activities within [the CSA]."<sup>21</sup>

As limited as it was, the RCMP's preliminary contact with the CSA is instructive on the nature of the surveillance process. First, students interested in politics, not simply "radical" politics, roused suspicion. Lobbying politicians for academic scholarships was sufficient provocation for the RCMP to investigate. Secondly, possible communist links to organizations like the CSA were of utmost interest and were invariably pursued. Thirdly, the RCMP risked generating inaccurate information if its informants, which included students, were inexperienced or unreliable. Much time and embarrassment could have been saved had a single member of the Force read previously published issues of a student newspaper such as the University of Toronto *Varsity* on the CSA's genesis and campus activities. As subsequent events would reveal, the RCMP would be better prepared for its next encounter with the CSA.

### III

THAT INTERACTION flowed from the third national conference of the Canadian Student Assembly held in Ste Anne de Bellevue, Québec from 28-31 December, 1939. Convened to address a wide range of issues, from curriculum reform to

<sup>18</sup>H.R. Gagnon to the Superintendent Commanding "C" Division, 6 March 1939, 85-A-88.

<sup>19</sup>Clipping from *Montreal Star*, 6 March 1939, 85-A-88.

<sup>20</sup>Kirkpatrick to W. Munday, Superintendent Commanding "O" Division, 2 March 1939, 85-A-88.

<sup>21</sup>Memo to H.R. Gagnon, 25 March 1939, 85-A-88.

national unity, the conference was dominated by the question of Canada's participation in World War II. French Canadian delegates gave strong support to a resolution opposing compulsory wartime service. They were joined by a block of English Canadian representatives, but there was no overall consensus in this issue. While students in western Canada were opposed to conscription, those in the Maritimes were not, and in Ontario, opinion was split. Debate at the conference climaxed with a much-publicized walkout led by the Mount Allison delegation, whose spokesman, Dean of Men, C.A. Krug,<sup>22</sup> alleged that the conference was being manipulated by those who were "anti-British, anti-war and anti-all those principles which form the basis of our ties with the British Empire." In light of the controversy, the conference resolved to distribute a questionnaire on university campuses across Canada to "ascertain the opinion of youth in this matter" and to publish the results. Co-sponsored by the CSA, the Canadian Youth Congress, and Bloc Universitaire (a French Canadian student association), the questionnaire was intended to survey youth opinion on conscription, civil liberties, war profiteering, and youth employment.<sup>23</sup>

Both the conference and the proposed survey attracted the attention of the RCMP. Its information about the CSA came from a variety of sources: campus and city newspaper clippings, copies of documents prepared by the CSA including those circulated at the conference and subsequent to it, and surveillance reports based on information provided by RCMP informants, some of whom participated in the conference itself. The files also included a photograph from the conference on which "those who took a fairly prominent part in discussing matters dealing with Conscription and Canadian Policy [were] marked in ink."<sup>24</sup> A complete list of conference delegates was prepared and those individuals who appeared to be "connected to the Young Communist League" were duly noted.<sup>25</sup> Attempts were also made to investigate CSA-YCL links at individual campuses across the country. According to one report, "practically all of the CSA [at the University of Manitoba] was composed of members of YCL."<sup>26</sup>

Given its opposition to conscription, its commitment to further political organization, and the suspected participation of communists in the association, the CSA was closely scrutinized. That its "loyalty" to the British Empire in wartime was questioned also damaged the CSA's image in the eyes of its critics both within the RCMP and the community at large. Significantly, to the RCMP, student opposition to conscription was evidence of potential subversion. Yet in the period leading up to the 1940 federal election, the Liberal government itself, under the leadership of

<sup>22</sup>Although this was a student conference, it was common practice in that period for professors to be invited to serve as discussion group leaders.

<sup>23</sup>A fuller account of some CSA activities can be found in Paul Axelrod, "The Student Movement of the 1930s."

<sup>24</sup>V.A.M. Kemp to Commissioner, 5 February 1940, 85-A-88.

<sup>25</sup>Gagnon to the Commissioner, 17 January 1940, 85-A-88.

<sup>26</sup>Kemp to the Commissioner, 24 January 1940, 85-A-88.



Prime Minister Mackenzie King, vigilantly opposed conscription, and was re-elected.<sup>27</sup>

Surveillance of the CSA took a number of forms. Reports, replete with severe ideological judgements, were received from a professor who evidently served as one of several resource leaders at the December conference. He expressed "disgust" with what he called the "anti-British" motives of the meeting, and he alleged that the more conservative professors were assigned to participate in discussions on non-controversial subjects such as the improvement of university education and the extension of university services. But professors appointed to discussion groups on external affairs and Canadian unity were "known to have radical leanings" and could be expected to speak in favour of radical resolutions on these matters. These individuals included Frank Underhill from the University of Toronto, Frank Scott of McGill and Arthur Lower of Winnipeg's United College. According to a brief sent from the commander of the Toronto detachment to the Commissioner, they were all "regarded in University life as being men of extreme thought, if not definitely Communist."<sup>28</sup>

The latter allegation was patently false. None of these professors were communists. Frank Scott and Frank Underhill were members of the League for Social Reconstruction and supporters of the non-communist, social-democratic CCF.<sup>29</sup> Arthur Lower favoured civil liberties and criticized British foreign policy, but his thinking was rooted in nationalism and liberalism, not socialism or communism.<sup>30</sup>

Nonetheless, having spoken critically to an association already deemed subversive by some RCMP observers, the professors ran some legal and professional risks. V.A.M. Kemp, Commander of the Toronto Division, recommended that Frank Underhill be charged under the Defence of Canada Regulations for having delivered a speech critical of Canadian foreign policy at the CSA convention; this advice was not followed, though Underhill was not out of the woods. Efforts, ultimately unsuccessful, were made to fire him from the University of Toronto for his "disloyal" public statements issued later in 1940.<sup>31</sup>

RCMP informants attended the CSA conference not merely as observers, but also as participants who attempted to influence policy. An unnamed individual from McGill who joined the CSA conference session on Canada in World Affairs,

<sup>27</sup>See J.L. Granatstein, *Canada's War: The Politics of the Mackenzie King Government, 1939-1945* (Toronto 1975), 5; J.L. Granatstein, *The Politics of Survival: The Conservative Party of Canada, 1939-1945* (Toronto 1967), 60.

<sup>28</sup>Kemp to Commissioner, 26 January 1940, 85-A-88.

<sup>29</sup>On the political views of Scott and Underhill, see Michiel Horn, *The League for Social Reconstruction*, and R. Douglas Francis, *Frank H. Underhill: Intellectual Provocateur* (Toronto 1986).

<sup>30</sup>Carl Berger, *The Writing of Canadian History* (Toronto 1976), 135-6; Arthur Lower, *My First Seventy-five Years* (Toronto 1967), 138-9, 343.

<sup>31</sup>See Francis, *Frank H. Underhill*, ch. 10.

spoke against the "left-wing" resolutions on foreign policy and conscription, though his views were voted down. He recommended in his report to the RCMP that the CSA be replaced by a new student body which would "further our war effort, and make for a greater and more firm national life based in loyalty to our government and the crown."<sup>32</sup> Another informant, who was chair of a CSA committee on the improvement of French-English relations, attended a follow-up meeting of the CSA's Toronto delegation. He resigned when the group confirmed the decision to circulate the controversial campus questionnaire.<sup>33</sup>

How did the RCMP plan to respond to the nation-wide survey? Consideration was given to outlawing the referendum, though this was expected to "do more harm than good" by "creating sympathy for those against whom the action is taken."<sup>34</sup> Instead, a counter-informational campaign was proposed. According to the commanding officer of the Toronto detachment, "Some form of education to combat this subversive activity and to instill into the minds of young Canadians the patriotic aspect of War service in the present struggle, is essential." This was deemed particularly necessary in light of the influence of some politically unreliable university professors, including those mentioned above. Legal sanctions against them might be considered, but "by delaying such action for a period of two or three months, during which time the student body was educated to think along patriotic lines would have an entirely different effect. The formation of a student organization whose aims and objects would be citizenship would, it is felt, particularly nullify the effects of the proposed ballot and any other subversive thought which may have been engendered." Reference was also made in this report to a staff member at the University of Toronto who "could and is willing to use every effort in his power to assist the Government in defeating the subversive elements in our Universities."<sup>35</sup> In his memorandum to the Commissioner, Assistant Commissioner Tait agreed that "counter-propaganda within these institutions by competent persons who have the interests of the Universities and the safety of the country at heart" would be the most effective way to combat the referendum.<sup>36</sup>

The RCMP, then, favoured direct intervention in the mission to undermine the CSA. The scope and details of its involvement are unclear, though certain initiatives were unquestionably taken. According to one of Kemp's reports, "we now have a number of contacts in the University [of Toronto] in unrelated groups. [Two of the gentlemen] have intimated their desire to cooperate in any possible way to nullify the activities of the CSA and have taken practical steps in this direction already." These tactics included disrupting CSA meetings with "loud 'horse laughs' when the

<sup>32</sup>Cited in Gagnon to Commissioner, 7 February 1940, 85-A-88.

<sup>33</sup>Kemp to Commissioner, 5 February 1940, 85-A-88.

<sup>34</sup>*Intelligence Bulletin*, 12 February 1940, reprinted in Kealey and Whitaker, *RCMP Security Bulletins, 1939-1941*, 143.

<sup>35</sup>Kemp to Commissioner, 26 January 1940, 85-A-88.

<sup>36</sup>Tait to Commissioner, 29 January 1940; *Intelligence Bulletin*, 12 February 1940, reprinted in Kealey and Whitaker, 143.

questionnaire is mentioned." He attributed the growing opposition to the CSA's campaign at the University of Toronto to the "influence which I have referred to earlier in this report."<sup>37</sup>

Such tactics were reportedly used at the most famous CSA meeting during the referendum campaign. On 6 February, at McGill University, a CSA meeting was disrupted by opponents' "laughter," "boos" and "catcalls."<sup>38</sup> In what the *Montreal Gazette* dramatically called a "riotous session" where the CSA was "smashed" by five hundred students, the CSA's leaders were prevented from speaking and ultimately compelled to leave the room. The meeting was taken over by the CSA's opponents who passed resolutions dissolving the CSA and rejecting the conscription referendum.<sup>39</sup>

Despite the intimidating tactics and near violence of the encounter, the RCMP considered the confrontation an important episode in the anti-CSA movement. According to the RCMP publication, *Intelligence Bulletin*, "Last week the students of McGill rose in sudden wrath to forbid the Canadian Student Assembly ... [deletion] ... in their midst from speaking in the name of the University. A few loyal students had been shown the hidden hand."<sup>40</sup>

With or without RCMP involvement, the CSA fared poorly in most of the country. By the end of January member groups from seven universities had seceded from the CSA and more followed. Support remained strongest in Québec where Laval and Université de Montréal students were polled and almost overwhelmingly opposed conscription. But a number of universities in English Canada refused to hold the referendum and at the University of British Columbia the student council suspended the CSA "on the grounds that the national conference had brought adverse publicity to the university by its reported anti-war atmosphere."<sup>41</sup> Detailed accounts of the anti-CSA campaign across Canada were collected by the RCMP. In March, V.A.M. Kemp concluded that "it is impossible to establish any tie in between the Communist Party and the Canadian Student Assembly at the present time."<sup>42</sup> By April, the RCMP was able to report that the CSA was a "dead issue" in Ontario,<sup>43</sup> and by the end of May, the Commissioner was informed that the organization was "going to pieces all over the country."<sup>44</sup>

<sup>37</sup>Kemp to Commissioner, 19 February 1940, 85-A-88.

<sup>38</sup>Kemp to Commissioner, 19 February 1940, 85-A-88; memo prepared by B.H. Guenette, 7 February 1940, an RCMP officer who attended meeting.

<sup>39</sup>*Montreal Gazette*, 7 February 1940. Also, S.W. Harrison to the Commissioner, 21 February 1940, 85-A-88.

<sup>40</sup>*Intelligence Bulletin*, 12 February 1940, reprinted in Kealey and Whitaker, 157.

<sup>41</sup>*Ubysses*, student newspaper, 9 February 1940. See also Axelrod, "The Student Movement," 230.

<sup>42</sup>Kemp to Commissioner, 8 March 1940, 85-A-88.

<sup>43</sup>Kemp to Commissioner, 8 April 1940; E.F. Kush to Sgt. Leopold, 12 April 1940, 85-A-88.

<sup>44</sup>H.A.R. Gagnon to Commissioner, 29 May 1940, 85-A-88.

While the RCMP was heartened by these events, it remained concerned about radical influences within Canadian universities. To broaden its information base, it probed connections between the CSA and American youth organizations. An informant attended a student association meeting in St. Louis in February 1940 and reported close links between "certain elements in the United States and Canada," though these were unspecified in the report. To ensure that "our counter-propaganda needs [are] intelligently directed," the informant recommended that "someone with an academic position and academic prestige, sufficient to gain access to the inner circles of the Universities, be commissioned to make an investigation of them from East to West during the next two months. He would, of course, have to conduct the investigation as though it were one on University teaching or some problem of University administration. He should also be provided with a liberal expense account to bear the cost of free entertainment in which tongues are loosened." It is not clear whether this proposal was taken up.<sup>45</sup>

By mid 1940, the CSA had dissolved. Though it had elicited much support for its national scholarship campaign, its anti-war crusade was out of step with public opinion, both within and beyond universities, particularly once the war had begun. Notably, while CSA membership dwindled, voluntary enlistments by students in campus Canadian Officer Training Corps contingents rose impressively.<sup>46</sup> The RCMP's involvement may not have been required to destroy the CSA, but it evidently did more than merely witness and report on this event; it attempted to hasten it.

#### IV

THE BEST KNOWN YOUTH ORGANIZATION in Canada during the 1930s was the Canadian Youth Congress, founded in 1935 as a coordinating body for local "youth councils" which had been formed in several large Canadian cities. Committed to lobbying the federal government for youth-oriented legislation that would reverse the devastating impact of the Depression, it held annual conferences, each of which drew several hundred delegates. At its peak, the CYC represented major youth organizations with a total constituent membership of over 400,000. (The Canadian Student Assembly was one of the member associations). In 1936 it issued a Declaration of the Rights of Canadian Youth calling for youth employment programs, social security, improved health, recreation and educational facilities, and world peace.<sup>47</sup> Its idealism notwithstanding, the CYC had a brief and stormy history. It was beset by conflicts between communists and non-communist members, and by harassment from the RCMP. It survived until 1942 when it was declared an illegal organization under the Defence of Canada Regulations.

<sup>45</sup>Kemp to Commissioner, 8 March 1940, 85-A-88.

<sup>46</sup>Axelrod, "The Student Movement," 231.

<sup>47</sup>Declaration of Rights of Canadian Youth, 25 May 1936, CSIS Files, Accession # 89-A-128.

The RCMP's files on the CYC were voluminous and included documents on conference planning, agendas, discussion papers, conference resolutions, post conference activities, and other internal correspondence — all of which supplemented the regular dispatches prepared by informants. Efforts were made each year to determine the organizational connections and political associations of conference delegates, and on at least one occasion to ascertain how individuals at the conference voted on specific resolutions.<sup>48</sup> A report on the 1937 Montréal conference submitted that 50 of the 730 people in attendance were members of the YCL, and 150 more were "straight communists" representing other organizations. At times RCMP reports noted the apparent ethnic and religious backgrounds of youth group members, with a particular focus on Jews. A report on a Montreal Youth Council meeting in 1940 noted that of some 100 participants, "25% were French Canadian, 85% were Communists, and 40% were Jewish." The report continued: "Only one of the speakers [name deleted] ... (a jewess) openly and directly spoke against conscription; the rest of the speakers expressed a qualified opposition."<sup>49</sup> A subsequent report on a Youth Congress meeting in Montréal observed, without indicating how this conclusion was reached, that "the great majority of the audience was mainly composed of Hebrew faith."<sup>50</sup> Similarly, a report on the Canadian Student Assembly observed that the "amount of Jews [sic] in the CSA, mostly from the West and McGill, was remarkable."<sup>51</sup>

From the RCMP's perspective, the most significant documents on file were internal Young Communist League papers detailing its own strategy with respect to the CYC. Given the speed with which it was able to gather such confidential material, the RCMP appeared to have insiders in the head offices of both the CYC and the YCL, as well as access to the organizations' mail.<sup>52</sup>

In light of the RCMP's anti-communist fixation, the Canadian Youth Congress was understandably a major source of concern. According to an RCMP memo, "the Canadian Youth Congress marks the culmination of several years of systematic work of the Communist Party and the Young Communist League in an attempt to

<sup>48</sup>This was done for the 1937 conference, R.E. Mercer to the Commissioner, 13 July 1937, 89-A-128.

<sup>49</sup>Memorandum on "the Montreal Youth Council," by H.A.R. Gagnon, Commander of "C" Division, 14 June 1940. A previous report by Cst. J.H. St. Louis, Montreal detachment, 19 March 1940, on a meeting of the Montreal Youth Council also concluded that "the majority [present] were Jewish."

<sup>50</sup>Report prepared by J.J.P. Bourgeault, 20 January 1941, 89-A-128.

<sup>51</sup>Gagnon to the Commissioner, 15 February 1940, 85-A-88.

<sup>52</sup>John Leopold, an undercover agent using the name Jack Esselwein, infiltrated the Communist party in the late 1920s and testified at the trial of Tim Buck and other Communist leaders who were subsequently jailed. Kealey and Whitaker, "Introduction," *RCMP Security Bulletins*, 11.

build a united front."<sup>53</sup> As one officer explained, the "Communist Party is using the youth council movement to 'chin' itself into a better class of society."<sup>54</sup> This analysis was not dissimilar to that of the Communist party itself. It acknowledged, both at the time and in retrospect, its commitment to building a united front of youth groups, particularly with the CYC. Alliances with such non-communist organizations were intended to play a major role in forging a broadly based anti-capitalist and anti-fascist movement. And there is no doubt that Canadian communists participated in the organization of the CYC and influenced its policy. Internal YCL documents collected by the RCMP confirmed these facts.

According to a member of the Young Communist League, undoubtedly attempting to raise the spirits of his comrades, the 1936 conference of the Canadian Youth Congress was a "tremendous victory for the political and tactical line of the Communist Party and Young Communist League ... The Congress showed how it was possible to get other people from non-Communist organizations to speak in favour of Communist positions on various questions thereby strengthening the prestige of the Communists and speeding up the move towards 'left' ideas."<sup>55</sup> With frankness such as this, the RCMP's impressions of the CYC as a potentially "subversive" organization were reinforced and remained indelible.

The RCMP's assessment of the 1937 conference of the CYC in Montréal was instructive. Based on its access to internal YCL reports, the RCMP correctly anticipated a major debate involving French Canadian delegates to the conference. The Québec delegation introduced resolutions "apparently designed to drive the Communists from the Congress." These included statements affirming the "right of individuals to private property" and to the "belief in God" both of which were anathema to communist ideology. These motions passed the convention with the support of the YCL delegation which was determined to ensure that conference unity was maintained despite the conservative ideological orientation of the resolutions. According to one YCL spokesman the pro-business motion was justified on the grounds that "the smaller fellow" was entitled to more private property. YCL endorsement of the resolution on "God" was later rationalized as a democratic act by the YCL out of its respect both for Congress delegates, the majority of whom were God fearing, and for many of the YCL's own members who were Catholics, Protestants and Jews.<sup>56</sup>

<sup>53</sup>Memorandum on Canadian Youth Congress, J.H. MacBrien to Ernest Lapointe, 18 June 1936, 89-A-128.

<sup>54</sup>A.H. Mellor, Superintendent Assistant DCI to the Officer Commanding "C" Division, 26 May 1937, 89-A-128.

<sup>55</sup>Dated 9 June 1936; also MacBrien to Lapointe 18 June 1936, 89-A-128. See also official history of the Canadian Communist Party, *Canada's Party of Socialism: History of the Communist Party of Canada, 1921-1976* (Toronto 1982), 117.

<sup>56</sup>*Clarion*, 31 May 1937, 89-A-128.

What was the significance of a CYC conference which, uncharacteristically, passed such 'right wing' resolutions? At first, it led F.J. Mead, the commanding officer of the Montréal Division to the conclusion that "the reins of leadership have been taken out of the hands of the Communist delegates and are now being controlled by the more rational organizations."<sup>57</sup> This interpretation, however, did not endure. A subsequent memorandum by another officer concluded that the conference had essentially been duped by the communists. By staving off their expulsion from the CYC, "the Communists were able to influence the delegates of the English-speaking youth in the majority, to take a course which leaves the road open to future violence on the part of subversive groups."<sup>58</sup> This perspective formed the basis of the "official" interpretation of the conference as conveyed to Ernest Lapointe, the federal Minister of Justice. According to the Commissioner, "It will be noted that the Communist representations of the Congress was very large and that the Communist party are fully satisfied with the result of the success met ... towards forming a bridge to the Youth of Canada for propaganda purposes."<sup>59</sup>

Given the conservative resolutions passed at the conference and the open condemnation of communists both within the CYC and in the daily press, the RCMP was surely straining credulity by declaring the 1937 conference a Communist triumph. Within the ranks of the YCL, there was some disagreement over this issue, about which the RCMP was well informed. Party critics were distraught at the compromising tactics of the YCL delegation, particularly its refusal to confront the provocative pro-God, pro-business policy statements. The YCL leadership, however, defended the strategy, arguing that it enhanced the influence of the YCL within the CYC, an assessment clearly embraced by the RCMP. Promoting this interpretation made it possible for the RCMP to continue portraying communists in the youth movement as a clear, present, and continuing danger. When communists publicly played down their political importance among youth groups or in universities, the RCMP disputed their claims. When communists inflated their "victories" for internal organizational consumption, the RCMP employed such rhetoric for its own propaganda purposes.<sup>60</sup> From the RCMP perspective: heads the communists win and tails their enemies lose. Hence vigilance against them was ever necessary.

Such vigilance was shown the Saskatchewan branch of the Canadian Youth Congress on the occasion of the 1939 Royal visit to the campus of the University of Saskatchewan in Saskatoon. The event coincided with a provincial congress meeting, and it was considered "advisable that plain clothes men be detailed to mingle with the youth congress" while the Royals were present. While the RCMP

<sup>57</sup>Mead to Commissioner, 25 May 1937, 89-A-128.

<sup>58</sup>22 June 1937, author unclear, 89-A-128.

<sup>59</sup>MacBrien to Ernest Lapointe, Minister of Justice, 28 July 1937, 89-A-128.

<sup>60</sup>An account of the internal debate is produced in the communist publication, *Clarion*, 31 May 1937, copy in CSIS Files, 89-A-128.

informant did not expect trouble, "it will be well to be prepared."<sup>61</sup> Efforts were subsequently made to identify those in the Saskatchewan CYC who were affiliated with the YCL. Such attention was merited because "until now the Youth Congress in Saskatchewan has confined itself to discussion and talk on youth problems, but efforts will be made to activate the Congress in various actions (delegations, peace parades, boycott parades), of a more 'leftist' nature."<sup>62</sup>

But as in the case of the CSA, no issue exercised the RCMP more than the CYC's position on Canada's involvement in World War II. When a "clear cut" motion of support for the federal government's conduct of the war failed to pass the youth congress convention of 1940, a number of member organizations withdrew from the CYC. These included the Montréal Presbytery of the United Church, the National Council of YWCA, and Greater Winnipeg Young Liberals. That extensive communist influence in the CYC had already been alleged at a time when the Hitler-Stalin pact was in effect, damaged the unity, credibility and effectiveness of the CYC.<sup>63</sup> Its "loyalty" was openly questioned, thus providing the RCMP with new grist for its ideological mill. According to the *Intelligence Bulletin*, "It is quite apparent that the Canadian Youth Congress is calculated to undermine the morale of the younger generation in Canada, to inculcate an entirely wrong impression of responsibility of citizenship and to discount the traditions and principles for which this country is now at war."<sup>64</sup>

Perceived as so threatening, the CYC was subject to especially aggressive forms of surveillance by the RCMP. It conducted at least two raids on CYC affiliate offices, seizing literature, minutes of meetings, and lists of names and addresses. One intrusion occurred in May 1940 at the offices of the Montreal Youth Council. Another took place in February 1941 at the home of Mr. Jack Brierley, Montréal secretary of the CYC. While disputing some of the CYC's allegations about the details of these and other events, the RCMP acknowledged that Brierley's home had been raided. "This was done after this individual's name had been repeatedly mentioned in connection with contemplated activities between the Canadian Youth Congress (Montreal Youth Council) and the Communist Party members. The action was well warranted and substantiated by the fact that a copy of the *Art Review* (Communist Party publication) was found along with a list of names of members. The list constitutes for the main part names of persons, which are on record as being active Communist Party members, many of whom are now interned."<sup>65</sup> Justice

<sup>61</sup>C.M. Gray to Officer Commanding "F" Division, Regina, 27 March 1939, 89-A-128.

<sup>62</sup>Cpl. A.W. Parsons to Officer Commanding "F" Division, 9 May 1939, 89-A-128.

<sup>63</sup>See an account of this meeting by Grace MacInnis, "Crisis in the Canadian Youth Congress," *Canadian Forum*, August 1940, 140-1; and Kenneth Woodsworth, (national secretary of the CYC), "A Reply to Mrs. MacInnis," *Canadian Forum*, August 1940.

<sup>64</sup>*Intelligence Bulletin*, 15 July 1940, reprinted in Kealey and Whitaker, 281-2.

<sup>65</sup>Gagnon to the Commissioner, 4 April 1941, 89-A-128. CYC's version of events included in letter from Kenneth Woodsworth, Secretary CYC, to Justice Minister Lapointe, 20 February 1941, 89-A-128.



Minister Lapointe answered a question about the raid in the House of Commons. He said the "the search was made in an endeavour to trace the source of Communist publications and literature which is being insidiously and widely distributed throughout the city of Montreal."<sup>66</sup>

The CYC also contended that in May 1940, the RCMP "grilled the national Chairman of the Youth Congress in Saskatoon, accusing him of being a Communist and threatening him with loss of employment. The Chairman was a member of the Young Liberals and the Junior Board of Trade. He resigned from his position in the Youth Congress shortly after."<sup>67</sup> This incident was especially delicate because Dave Bowman, the individual in question, died not long after being questioned by the RCMP.<sup>68</sup> In his memorandum to the Commissioner, Commander H.A.R. Gagnon, refuted the CYC version of events. He claimed that Bowman had resigned because he disagreed with the CYC's stand on war policy and that at no time was Bowman's employment threatened. In response to other CYC allegations of police harassment, the RCMP conceded that it had on occasion brought in for questioning other youth congress supporters whose "communist" affiliations were probed.

Having come to the conclusion that the Canadian Youth Congress was a "mouth-piece, to a large extent, for the Communist Party of Canada and the Young Communist League in particular," the RCMP conducted a sustained campaign to have the organization banned.<sup>69</sup> By this time the Communist Party itself had been outlawed under the Defence of Canada Regulations, and in July 1940, Commissioner S.T. Wood recommended to Justice Minister Lapointe that the CYC be so treated owing to its communist links. Statements from several community groups opposing the CYC and calling for its suppression were appended to Wood's memo.<sup>70</sup>

Initially, the federal government resisted this pressure. Indeed, in the House of Commons, on 9 July 1940, Justice Minister Lapointe explained why the CYC had not yet been banned. "Those I have charged to investigate the matter have reported to me as follows: The official policy of the youth congress concerns itself with youth problems of a general nature, and although radically inclined it cannot be termed communistic."<sup>71</sup> Of course, the RCMP had in fact been denouncing the CYC as communistic, so the Minister's advice on this matter came from elsewhere. That "various church and other reputable organizations are affiliated with and take part in the activities of the CYC" might explain the thinking behind the govern-

<sup>66</sup>House of Commons *Debates*, 27 February 1941, 1079.

<sup>67</sup>Woodsworth to Lapointe, 20 February 1941, 89-A-128.

<sup>68</sup>No other details of his death are provided in the files.

<sup>69</sup>Gagnon to the Commissioner, 4 April 1941, 89-A-128.

<sup>70</sup>Wood to Lapointe, 20 July 1940, 89-A-128.

<sup>71</sup>House of Commons *Debates*, 9 July 1940, 1944. See also Memo from Minister's Office to the Commissioner, 14 August 1940, 89-A-128.

ment's decision. To ban the "communistic" CYC when it was supported by such respectable groups could prove embarrassing.<sup>72</sup>

The RCMP's antipathy to the CYC was underlined by a campaign undertaken by the organization on behalf of four internees being held as "enemy aliens" at a Canadian detention camp. CYC secretary Kenneth Woodsworth requested information about these individuals who were "known anti-Nazis, active in youth movements in their respective countries."<sup>73</sup> He claimed that they had fled to England and had apparently been sent to Canada. A letter from Woodsworth to one of the internees offering to send him reading materials was intercepted by the authorities and "not delivered to the addressee."<sup>74</sup> Assistant Commissioner Tait explained that "it is our opinion that no organization should be allowed to enter into an exchange of correspondence with internees, but that if they wish to be of assistance to them, to confine their activities to sending parcels of what may be described as ordinary comforts, not including books, as there is no question in our mind that the Canadian Youth Congress, for example, would include books of a radical and undesirable nature."<sup>75</sup>

In the months that followed, the CYC's situation worsened. In February 1941, RCMP Commissioner S.T. Wood published a statement denouncing "youth councils" in Canada as "Communist," and contended further: "It is not the Nazi nor the Fascist but the radical who constitutes our most troublesome problem."<sup>76</sup> In an increasingly hostile environment, the CYC lost a number of its prominent affiliate members, including the YMCA, which claimed the organization was "not Christian, not democratic, and not Canadian."<sup>77</sup>

However, in the spring of 1941, following the dissolution of the Hitler-Stalin pact and the invasion of the Soviet Union by Nazi Germany, the CYC's policy on the war changed markedly, as did that of the Communist Party itself. The CYC now called for total war against fascism, including the conscription of manpower and wealth. The editor of *Saturday Night* magazine accused the CYC of obediently following Soviet policy changes — an accusation issued earlier from social

<sup>72</sup>This motive is articulated in a memo from R.R. Tait, Assistant Commissioner and Director of Criminal Investigation to the Commander of "C" Division, 8 January 1941, 89-A-128.

<sup>73</sup>Woodsworth to Lapointe, 30 July 1940, 89-A-128.

<sup>74</sup>Letter accompanies memo prepared by Charles Chauveau to Officer Commanding "C" Division, 7 January 1941, 89-A-128.

<sup>75</sup>Tait to Colonel Stethem, Director of Internment Operations, Department of Secretary of State, 17 January 1941, 89-A-128.

<sup>76</sup>Statement included in CSIS Files. Published initially under the title "Tools for Treachery" in the *Canadian Spokesman*, 1, 2 (1941), 1-6. See also Kealey and Whitaker, "Introduction," 16.

<sup>77</sup>*Montreal Gazette*, 15 April 1941, 89-A-128.

democrats in the Cooperative Commonwealth Youth Federation (CCYM) which, for years, had waged a cold war with communists inside and outside the CYC.<sup>78</sup>

Though it had now joined the political mainstream with respect to its policy on the war, the CYC proved ultimately unable to save itself from the strong arm of the state. The RCMP's advice was finally heeded, and in 1942, despite its support of the pro-conscription position in the national plebiscite, the CYC was declared an illegal organization and compelled to disband.<sup>79</sup> An intriguing chapter in the history of the youth movement had come to an end.

### CONCLUSION

THE SURVEILLANCE RECORDS of the RCMP provide new information about the restrictions placed upon the privacy rights and political freedom of Canadians, including those within universities during the 1930s and early 1940s. Throughout this *pre* cold war period, the RCMP continued its crusade against "communism" initiated after the Bolshevik Revolution in Russia. Canadian communists themselves should not have been surprised by the attention shown them. After all, they favoured, at least theoretically, revolutionary change, and they drew their inspiration from a foreign government opposed to the practices of liberal democracy. However, the RCMP did not require evidence of revolutionary, undemocratic, or even radical activity among students, professors and youth groups to justify their surveillance. Criticizing the government, holding political meetings, and promoting policies such as youth employment programs, activities which consumed the bulk of CSA and CYC time, including that of the communists within these organizations, were all deemed by the RCMP to be subversive, or potentially subversive. Indeed, in these circumstances, the *exercise* of their democratic rights was more than likely to earn young people, particularly if they were Jewish, the scrutiny of the police. From the RCMP perspective, youth who pressed for changes in social policy during the Depression lacked legitimacy because, virtually by definition, they were perceived to be manipulated by communists.

While the state could be expected to impose heavier forms of censorship in wartime, there was not the slightest indication from the RCMP records that the CSA or the CYC interfered with the successful prosecution of the war. Youth opposition to conscription, which so irked the RCMP, was expressed long before this became government policy, and was clearly a subject of legitimate debate in national politics. It is ironic, too, that the CYC was banned in the wake of its declaration of support for "total war," including compulsory military service.

<sup>78</sup> *Saturday Night* magazine, 30 August 1941; Grace MacInnis, "Crisis in the Youth Congress," and Kenneth Woodsworth, "A Reply to Mrs. MacInnis," *Canadian Forum*, August 1940.

<sup>79</sup> "Statement on the Plebiscite by the National Committee of the Canadian Youth Congress," Frank and Libby Park Papers, MG 31 K9 vol. 7 128A, National Archives of Canada.

Even officials within the Prime Minister's office questioned the excessiveness of the RCMP's surveillance activities, though apparently little was done to contain them. As J.W. Pickersgill, assistant to the Prime Minister, noted in a 1939 assessment of the RCMP publication, *Intelligence Bulletin*, the RCMP habitually failed to "distinguish between facts and hearsay." It drew "no discrimination between legitimate social and political criticism and subversion ... It is evident that the police are attending and reporting on often completely harmless meetings, and spying on the daily activities of peaceful and law-abiding citizens." Despite their determination, the RCMP, according to Pickersgill, had to date found "no evidence of any suspected sabotage or espionage ..."<sup>80</sup>

If CSA and CYC members were dangers to the security of the state, then mere words were their weapons of choice. When the RCMP raided the offices of the CYC, they gathered nothing more than books, magazines, and lists of names. RCMP informants who clipped newspapers and attended the organizations' meetings reported on the speeches delivered and on the plans by those present to attend other meetings, make more speeches, and promote more policy. Although surveillance reports sometimes referred to the potentially "violent" character of these groups, the only meeting in the entire period that became disorderly had been disrupted by *opponents* of the CSA, whose actions were praised by the RCMP. And the evidence suggests, at least circumstantially, that RCMP informants contributed to this disturbance. To the RCMP Commissioner in 1940, left wing students and youth were more dangerous than fascists, an extreme and surprising assertion in the midst of a world war against fascism, and one that reflected the zealotry of the RCMP's ideological mission.

Although they were followed and periodically harassed, so-called "radical" students and youth were not the major victims of authoritarian actions by the "democratic" state. That Canadian universities remained bastions of middle-class respectability and social order, even during the Depression, limited the need for extensive intrusions by police agents into academic affairs.<sup>81</sup> Indeed, social democratic and communist activists themselves devoted far more energy to organizing working-class youth than university students, and were therefore less of a presence on college campuses than in labour unions and other extra-parliamentary organizations. This explains why the Canadian Youth Congress, whose constituency included the working class, elicited, from its founding moment, considerable RCMP attention. By contrast, the CSA, an exclusively student group, was "discovered" by the RCMP only after its political activities brought its respectability into question.

<sup>80</sup>National Archives of Canada, Mackenzie King Papers, Memorandum to King, 16 November 1940; "Note on a War-time intelligence service," 27 November 1939; "Analysis of the Intelligence Bulletin issued at RCMP Headquarters, 30 October 1939," quotations and full references cited in Kealey and Whitaker, 14.

<sup>81</sup>Paul Axelrod, *Making a Middle Class: Student Life in English Canada during the Thirties* (Montréal, 1990), esp. 39-43.

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Notwithstanding their ideological propriety, as forums for the discussion of ideas and social problems, universities were potential breeding grounds of critical thought and political "subversion," and from the RCMP perspective, they merited close scrutiny. Thus the small minority of students (and professors) who promoted social change, particularly through left-wing organizations like the CSA and CYC, were subjected to regular surveillance and periodic interrogation. During the 1930s and early 1940s, the "coercive" arm of the state was wielded more vigorously elsewhere in the war against the "enemy within," but on those occasions when students voiced views outside "the legitimate spectrum of opinion"<sup>82</sup> as in the case of the 1940 CSA-CYC anti-war campaign, they too were likely to encounter direct police intervention.<sup>83</sup> That RCMP surveillance reached into universities, with the full cooperation of at least some university authorities, also illustrated ways in which academic freedom was qualified, constrained, and even repudiated during this period.

The edited RCMP documents thus far released do not reveal all there is to know about the state's surveillance of universities, students, and youth groups during the 1930s and early 1940s. How informants were recruited, how information on individuals was used, and how the material on file affected the futures of the targeted subjects remains to be determined, though complete answers to these questions may never be found. At least some young Canadians do appear to have suffered later as a result of their politically "incorrect" views. Poet Irving Layton, a student in the mid 1930s, criticized British foreign policy and openly espoused left-wing causes. Subsequently, he was not allowed to enter the United States for some fifteen years and he claims to have seen his name on a security "blacklist" which labelled him a "dangerous subversive."<sup>84</sup>

It is also clear that the surveillance of universities and youth groups continued long after the end of World War II. During the 1960s, the RCMP "upgraded" its information gathering on university campuses despite the fact that this practice appeared to violate government orders issued in 1961, and that it contradicted assurances given to the contrary by Prime Minister Pearson in 1963.<sup>85</sup> The RCMP

<sup>82</sup>Whitaker, "Official Repression," 166.

<sup>83</sup>On the state's use of coercion, see Leo Panitch, "The Role and Nature of the Canadian State," in Panitch, ed., *The Canadian State: Political Economy and Political Power* (Toronto 1977). On the "enemy within," see Whitaker, "Official Representation," Betcherman, *The Little Band*, Barbara Roberts, "Shovelling out the 'Mutinous': Political Deportation from Canada before 1936"; Ann Gomer Sunahara, *The Politics of Racism*.

<sup>84</sup>"Say No Evil: Politicians, Radicals, and the Mounties: The Student Radical," in Len Sher, ed., *The Un-Canadians: True Stories of the Blacklist Era* (Toronto 1992), 105-6.

<sup>85</sup>*Commission of Inquiry Concerning Certain Activities of the Royal Canadian Mounted Police, Freedom and Security under the Law, Volume 1* (Ottawa 1981), Chapter 11. A detailed account of the surveillance practices are provided. The Commission concluded that the RCMP "programme to upgrade and improve their contacts with university faculty members ... was in conflict with the instructions received by the RCMP in 1961." *Ibid.*, 347.

had always urged Canadians to be vigilant in defending their freedoms. Police action itself, over many decades, underlined the soundness of this advice.

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