

Canucks join spy wars

It is the year 1992. A hut in a village deep in the north of Sri Lanka. Dark shadows thrown off by the feeble light of a smoky kerosene lantern dance across the walls. Twelve members of the Sinhalese Liberation Front squat on the floor.

Their leader, the feared terrorist "Mad Dog" Weejitunga, speaks in a low, menacing voice: "One among you is a Canadian spy."

The terrorists look at one another with fearful apprehension. Tension crackles in the sultry air. All eyes turn to the only woman present, who is sitting far back in the shadows. She, as it happens, is a half-Inuit, half-black, slightly handicapped, single lesbian mother sporting buttons that say "No Smoking" and "Viva Nicaragua."

Triumphantly, the terrorist leader thunders, "You are the Canadian spy!"

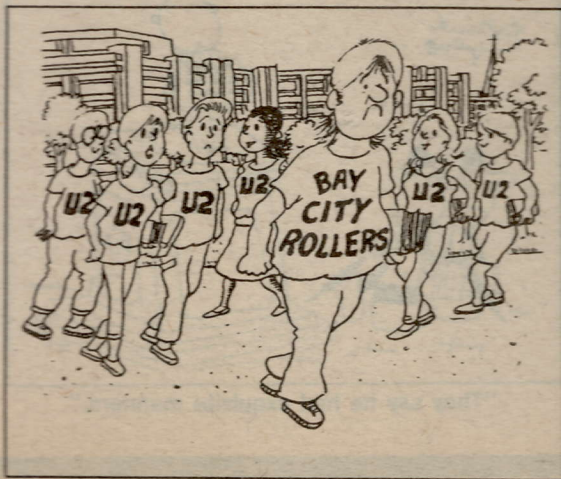
Back in Ottawa, Canadian Security and Intelligence Service spokesmen shrug off the capture, explaining that, yes, they did have a male agent who would have fit in a bit better but he didn't meet the department's visible minority, equal-opportunity, non-sexist employment guidelines.

Somehow, the notion of oh-so-good Canada dispatching spies abroad sounds a bit dippy. Not to CSIS though, which ran ads last week to recruit overseas agents and intelligence analysts. CSIS bureaucrats see the world as their oyster.

Of course, it's nice to have your own, 100% Canadian content foreign intelligence. That way you don't have to rely on hand-me-down info from the Americans and Brits, or tiny crumbs from the secretive Frenchies. But what on earth are Canada's amateur James Bonds going to find out?

In intelligence work, 98% of all information is available from open sources. All you need is thousands of people reading newspapers and magazines — plus the capability to analyze what it all means. As for covert sources, can we really imagine CSIS saying, "Okay, Dougie, off you go to Moscow and be sure to infiltrate the Kremlin, eh." Or, "Good luck Gaetan, and remember White House aides don't drink beer from the bottle." Amateur hour can also lead to red faces.

Punch



"He's a mature student."

ERIC MARGOLIS



A few years back the Swiss, who are very sensitive about defence and have a huge citizen army, were worrying that the Soviets might launch an attack against NATO that would break into Switzerland through neighboring Austria. The Swiss sent a senior military officer with a camera to snap photos of Austrian border defences. He was caught red-handed. The press had a field day, screaming "Swiss spy on Austria."

Everyone had a good laugh, except for the mortified Swiss.

Next, what if a daring Canadian spy discovers that Ethiopia is about to attack Canada? Now that our armed forces have been disarmed and we have beaten our swords into daycare centres, the best Canada could do is have Joe Clark send a stern letter to the aggressive Ethiopians and threaten to cut our aid to them. As for combatting terrorism, does anyone really believe that nice boys and girls from Manitoba are going to infiltrate Abu Nidal or the Sikhs?

Besides, Canada doesn't need to send agents abroad. We routinely import all sorts of criminals and terrorists. CSIS and the RCMP have their hands full just watching such miscreants in Canada.

Another point: Once CSIS has agents abroad, the next thing it will want will be its own spy satellites — the espionage status symbol for mid-ranking powers.

If we can't afford a navy or army, does it really make sense to watch the rest of the world? What will CSIS do with millions of pages of radio intercepts and stacks of yellowing photos?

A far cheaper and more efficient solution would be for Joe Clark to subscribe to the *Economist*. This excellent publication will supply him with all he needs to know about the outside world in easily readable form.

The alternative would be a vastly expensive spy network sending back such useful stuff as "Agent 12/3A reports rumor that the 213th Bulgarian armored regiment is being relocated from Plagbug to Kruptoka," or "Madagascar vanilla crop hit by loutworm blight." Sifting through such rubbish will cut deeply into long Ottawa lunch hours.

Finally, there are human concerns. Are Canadians ready to see their female Mata Haris give their wholesome bodies to short, oily Third World colonels with dirty finger nails in exchange for raw intelligence data? Ugh, yes, but that's spy business.

How many Canadian spies in the U.S. will defect to Miami in winter time? And just try living as a spy on Canadian dollars in Paris or Bonn. Better issue tin cups along with radio gear. Come to think of it, why don't we just hire some of the scads of East Bloc or Cuban spies who now work here in Canada and send them back home?