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Just Watch Us: RCMP Surveillance of the Women's Liberation Movement in Cold War Canada by Christabelle Sethna and Steve Hewitt (review)

Matthew S. Wiseman

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Admittedly there were some irreconcilables among farmers on both ends of the political spectrum. George Edwards, a former close associate of McPhail, campaigned for Jimmy Gardiner and the Liberal Party in the 1934 provincial election, while some Communist supporters of Williams in the internecine battles of the 1920s dismissed him and the CCF as social fascists by 1933. However, the decision of the United Farmers of Canada (Saskatchewan Section) to enter politics in 1931, the creation of the Farmer-Labour Party in 1932, and the growth of the CCF during the 1930s was not so much a victory of left over right as it was the incorporation of a very broad segment of the farm community into the CCF. The CCF cut a wide swath in rural Saskatchewan and would continue to do so for some time, which explains much of Saskatchewan's political history between 1944 and the 1970s. George Williams had much to do with making that possible. He was indeed a "socialist agrarian populist." The term is not a clumsy construct, as Conway somewhat apologetically suggests; it is an apt description.

John Conway should be congratulated on the publication of this excellent book. *The Prairie Populist: George Hara Williams and the Untold Story of the CCF* is a major contribution to Saskatchewan's political history and to the history of the CCF. It is indispensable to any study of the CCF in Saskatchewan and in Canada.

GEORGE HOFFMAN
University of Regina

**Christabelle Sethna and Steve Hewitt,
*Just Watch Us: RCMP Surveillance of the
Women's Liberation Movement in Cold
War Canada* (Montréal and Kingston:
McGill-Queen's University Press 2018)**

IN *JUST WATCH US*, Christabelle Sethna and Steve Hewitt examine why and how

the Royal Canadian Mounted Police (RCMP) monitored and investigated persons and groups belonging to the women's liberation movement in Canada during a fifteen-year period beginning in the late 1960s. Concerned that feminism had close ties to communism and the New Left, the intelligence branch of the RCMP targeted women's organizations perceived as challenging traditional societal norms that empowered the Anglo-Canadian, middle-class white male status quo. The authors argue that the RCMP watched and investigated the women's liberation movement through a "red-tinged prism," ignorantly associating second-wave feminists with the spread and provocations of the so-called Red Menace. (18) Feminism *per se* did not concern the RCMP's security service. The RCMP was largely blind to the radical and just demands of the women's movement. Instead, a preoccupation with leftist organizations and causes fueled increased surveillance efforts aimed at rooting out "real and imagined" communists in Canada. (21) This resulted in widespread harassment and repression of individuals and groups tied to the New Left, ultimately alienating and marginalizing women who belonged to social movements perceived as counter to the national interest.

Sethna and Hewitt contend that the RCMP intelligence branch employed a binary communist/anti-communist frame to assess security threats, resulting in mass surveillance of leftist organizations and social movements. In December 1963, a federal cabinet directive defined a subversive as "a person whose loyalty to Canada and our system of government is diluted by loyalty to any communist, fascist, or other legal or illegal political organizations whose purpose is inimical to the processes of Parliamentary Democracy." (35–36) This broad definition enabled the RCMP to target Canadian citizens,

increasing, rather than decreasing, surveillance. Anxieties about communism prompted an aggressive stance toward people and groups positioned on the left of the political spectrum, thus explaining the targeted surveillance of the women's liberation movement.

Broad definitions of subversive underpinned discriminatory practices pursued in the name of national security. Categorizing women as subversive empowered the RCMP to promote and pursue conservative policies and practices, reflecting wider societal issues in Canada from the late 1960s through the mid-1980s. The RCMP's security service opened a general file for women's liberation groups in May 1969, secretly collecting pamphlets, press reports, promotional materials, and meeting minutes about various events and causes across the country. Government agents worked alongside undercover informants, and the RCMP used women to spy and gather information from within feminist organizations and groups. As the Voice of Women protested Canadian complicity in the Vietnam War or activists marched for access to safe and legal abortion services, the RCMP selectively monitored thousands of alleged subversives on behalf of the federal government.

The core argument will not surprise readers attuned to Canadian Cold War history. Reg Whitaker, Gary Marcuse, Patrizia Gentile, and Gary Kinsman, among others, have documented civil liberty abuses against Canadian citizens during the Cold War. Under the guise of national security, state-driven paranoia created enemies from within and the RCMP targeted, monitored, harassed, and repressed individuals and family members in a continuous hunt for subversives. The red-tinged prism proposed by Sethna and Hewitt provides a new analytical frame for investigating surveillance history in a Canadian

context, but the findings of their work align closely with the established literature. The value of this book is its engagement with questions and issues of gender. While the existing scholarship considers discrimination based on race and sexual orientation as a motivator for Cold War surveillance in Canada, gender has yet served as the primary lens for investigating the motivations and methods of the RCMP's domestic intelligence and security activities. Sethna and Hewitt draw attention to institutionalized gender biases in Canada's police and security agencies, offering an important work of history that complements Tarah Brookfield's *Cold War Comforts: Canadian Women, Child Safety, and Global Insecurity* (Waterloo: Wilfrid Laurier University Press, 2012).

Three important themes underpin the book's core argument. First, the surveillance activities of the RCMP's security branch extended well beyond the women's liberation movement in the period under examination. The red-tinged prism encapsulated all groups, individuals, and activities perceived as having communist connections or sympathies, extending the cloak of national security threat to a wide and diverse range of civilian and government actors. Second, the authors explain that the targeted surveillance of the women's liberation movement mirrored earlier surveillance of left-wing organizations in Canada. Highlighting continuity in the surveillance activities of the RCMP, Sethna and Hewitt demonstrate the deep political anxieties that empowered the repressive monitoring activities of Canada's national police force. Third, existing attitudes about gender influenced the surveillance of groups and individuals belonging to the women's liberation movement. Male-dominated ideas and practices consumed the RCMP and an institutionalized masculinity fostered deep-rooted predispositions toward left-leaning organizations and

social movements perceived as radical. Although men and male-centred protest received increased attention from the police, gender-based policies in the RCMP reinforced discrimination toward leftist women and the social movements to which they belonged.

Sethna and Hewitt made extensive use of the Canadian Access to Information Act to obtain previously classified records about the RCMP and state surveillance of the women's liberation movement in Canada. In addition to declassified records, the authors incorporated archival materials from Simon Fraser University, the University of Pittsburgh, and the Canadian Women's Movement Archives at the University of Ottawa. Sethna and Hewitt also conducted a limited number of interviews, examined published government documents and reports, and read a range of secondary sources to investigate and understand their topic. Nevertheless, the authors acknowledge the limitations of their source base. As explained in the book's penultimate chapter, "The Paradox of the Mountie Bounty," researchers must treat surveillance records "as archival productions of a national security state, recognizing that their fractured nature means that our rendition of the stories they tell are, if not fictitious, then fragile." (170)

Despite the fragmentary and deceptive nature of state-produced security files, Sethna and Hewitt skillfully navigate the evidentiary record and offer a thorough study about the political anxieties that perpetuated the unjust surveillance of the women's liberation movement in Canada. Rather than explain how the RCMP monitored women labeled as subversive, the authors concentrate on the motivations behind the surveillance of feminist groups, individuals, and activities. They analyze domestic surveillance in the context of second-wave feminism, offering a fresh perspective that will

appeal to scholars interested in Cold War surveillance, the Canadian security state, and systemic issues of gender inequity in government and police agencies around the world. Institutionalized discrimination has a long and entrenched history in Western democratic nation-states, and *Just Watch Us* is another important reminder of the RCMP's complicated legacy in Canada. Sethna and Hewitt deserve credit for accessing declassified government files and unearthing records that will support future research in Canadian history, security and surveillance scholarship, and women and gender studies.

MATTHEW S. WISEMAN
University of Toronto

Mark R. Leeming, *In Defence of Home Places: Environmental Activism in Nova Scotia*, (Vancouver: University of British Columbia Press 2017)

MARK LEEMING'S book is about environmental activism in Nova Scotia in the 1960s to 1980s period, and focuses on the issues of nuclear power, chemical forestry, and uranium mining. The emerging environmental movement in the region was influenced by contemporary ideas such as the "limits to growth" and sought to raise issues concerning the relationship of people to nature, which implied changing the political culture. As politicians were not "consultative," the struggle for change by the 1980s resulted in different tactics and priorities by participants within the growing environmental movement; some focused on government and small gains and others retained their belief in substantive change in Nova Scotia society in harmony with the environment.

Diverse groups of people working at different jobs increasingly reacted against new industrialized projects politicians tried to attract to their communities. The companies had no notion of