

## A New Meaning to “Joint Policing”

A few months ago American novelist Russell Banks (*The Sweet Hereafter*, *Continental Drift*, *Affliction*) was trying to get into Canada so he could perform at Wordfest in Calgary. Canada Customs at Calgary International Airport pulled him out of line and held him for two hours. All this was detailed by James Adams in his column in *The Globe and Mail* (Nov 22, 2003).

As Canada Customs quietly thrashed through the deep gorse of his life, Banks pressed for a reason. The Canada Customs person finally divulged that Banks had not been candid about his having been arrested for marijuana possession in the United States in 1971. Then, suddenly, the impasse broke. His passport was stamped. He was free to go. He read at Wordfest. He left Canada.

I understand that, in the post-9/11 reality, Canada has made certain agreements with the Americans in the area of continental security (something called the “zone of confidence” where there is “joint policing”). This was agreed to by our then Foreign Affairs Minister John Manley and U.S. Homeland Security Chief Tom Ridge. In the process of becoming what Mr. Manley has described as “buds,” the two decided they and their respective police forces would

share databases, intelligence files and jet passenger lists, so it is entirely possible that this was the mechanism by which our customs officials figured out so quickly that Banks was a pot offender three decades ago.

If, as the Banks case suggests, “joint policing” the war on terror has begun to target 1971 pot offenders, it isn’t immediately clear to me why. It could mean that some massively funded American intelligence study has found a correlation between pot smoking in the age of the Grateful Dead and modern-day cells funneling money and fake passports to outlawed terrorist organizations. Maybe after we fifty- to sixty-year-olds go to bed at night in our 21st century suburban homes, some pot-induced historical influence causes us to rise again and move zombie-like to the computer,

where we authorize credit card payments that we will never remember come morning. I realize it’s far-fetched, but the FBI and Canada Customs aren’t fools. They must be on to something.

In the end, Russell Banks had a different take on his two-hour detention, and it had nothing to do with marijuana. He believes he was detained because of his being a vocal opponent of the Bush administration. Back home, Mr.

Banks was signatory to a document called “Not in Our Name,” that he and others signed to protest the U.S. Government’s having “declared a war without limit” and for having “instituted stark new measures of repression.”

What this implies is that, when confronted with Banks at the Calgary airport, our Canadian Customs officials ran him through the big joint computer, flipped his FBI file open in cyberspace, and found something like (I’m guessing now): “Known signer of petitions critical of our president, His Joint-Excellency George W. Bush. While detaining Mr. Banks, use the little-known fact that he received a suspended sentence for smoking pot in 1971.” This might be what Mr. Ridge and Mr. Manley meant in their “Smart Border Declaration” by “storing multiple biometrics.”



As for who will suffer most in this situation, it might turn out to be Canadian book fans—those who are passionate readers of American authors. Also signatory to the “Not in Our Name” petition were Alice Walker, Barbara Kingsolver, Grace Payley, Gloria Steinem and Noam Chomsky. It seems likely that we won’t be seeing much of them here in Canada after word gets out about Mr. Banks’s treatment at the Calgary airport. Then again, maybe they are the kind who would enjoy risking entry into the “zone of confidence” and will go on accepting Canadian invitations.

I don’t want to be a squeaky wheel here, but something does seem a little peculiar about Canada’s federal bureaucrats helping Mr. Bush and his FBI oppress their nation’s intellectuals. I mean, don’t we have dissident intellectuals of our own to harass? There’s always Rick Salutin, isn’t there? (If writing for the country’s biggest newspaper can be called dissidence.) Couldn’t we unplug his computer from time to time? Or, failing that, could we not reserve our cooperation for a time when the U.S. is oppressing opponents of a war of which Canada approves? And, even then, couldn’t we come up with an excuse for harassing them that involves behaviour we actually find offensive? That is, instead of pot smoking, something like showing contempt for hockey or taking the Queen Mum’s name in vain?

I know that John Manley has urged Canadians “not to get hung up on 20th century notions of sovereignty,” and that he received *Time’s* Canadian Newsmaker of the Year award for that bold new way of thinking, but sometimes I really do pine for Canadian policing that isn’t quite so joint. I mean, I think you should know when you’re pulled over by the Mounties if the charge is speeding or having been overheard in a restaurant telling George Bush jokes. As a character in a Hunter S. Thompson book once said: “I’m not paranoid. They really are out to get me.” There is a critical difference between the two, and I think Canadians deserve to know

which it is for them. Are we mentally ill or are we really being spied upon?

In the good old days, when Canada Customs seized another batch of books headed for Little Sisters Book and Art Emporium, there was no question what was going on. It was state censorship, pure and simple: Canada Customs playing gatekeeper to the national morality in that quaint little way of theirs. Now, in the era of the zone of confidence, when I hear that Canada Customs has prevented a comic anthology called *Meatman* from entering Canada and reaching Little Sisters, I wonder, is *Meatman* really a gay comic book or does it contain the formula for Japanese subway gas? I mean, it’s a little hard to believe that Canada Customs would be worried about a little gay comic when there are two million full-colour and streaming-video pornography sites of absolutely heartbreaking vileness two seconds away from every Canadian child’s fingertips on the Internet—don’t you think? How stupid would you have to be?

No, I am confident Canada Customs is not that dumb. *Meatman* must contain something sinister. Maybe it’s in the name. Maybe *Meatman* is where the instructions were found for making a single cow out of a herd manifest the symptoms of BSE disease, thus destabilizing the Canadian cattle industry and Ralph Klein for almost a year.

Beware *Meatman*, is all I can say, harmless gay comic that it might seem. If the next seizure is of a lesbian comic called *Chickenman*, we’re really going to have to batten down the coops. And if John Manley, upon his departure from Canadian politics, is asked to be Canadian Ambassador to the United States... What? It’s already happened?!

I think all this calls for a closing quotation from His Joint-Excellency:

“There is madmen in the world, and there are terror.”

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