

# An exchange on “Twenty years since the Air India bombings”

11 August 2005

*The following is a letter from a reader on “Twenty years since the Air India bombings: Why is the Canadian government resisting a public inquiry?” and a reply by David Adelaide, the article’s author.*

Your news article on the Air India bombing is welcome, considering that the mainstream Canadian press has not raised the challenging questions that you have raised.

I would however direct your attention to a book that was published by two Canadian journalists (*Toronto Star* and *Globe and Mail*) about their investigation and findings into the tragedy. The book, called *Soft Target*, is by Zuhair Kashmeri and Brian McAndrew. In it, the authors raise serious questions about who was really behind the plan.

Many Sikhs in Canada have read or know about the contents of this book and are in “quiet” agreement with it. I say quiet, because for the most part they have accepted the fact that the Sikh community was probably set up and that they may never be exonerated. They are content with what they do have here in this country and cherish it with great love and respect for all life.

PM

Dear PM,

Thank you for your recent email and apologies for the delayed reply. Here are a few comments in relation to Kashmeri and McAndrews’ *Soft Target*.

As you know, the central theme of their book is that it was the intelligence apparatus of the Indian state that played the predominant role in instigating the 1985 Air India bombing conspiracy. Although very difficult to confirm, this is not an impossible or implausible scenario. Given the intense efforts on the part of the Canadian authorities to bury this issue in the past, much of the truth about the bombings will no doubt remain shrouded in mystery.

But even if, for the sake of argument, one accepts the claim that forces within the Indian state manipulated the Khalistan activists into carrying out the Air India bombings, it must be recognized that it was their communalist and terrorist politics that made them susceptible to such manipulation. In the Punjab, the promoters of Khalistan were just as guilty of atrocities and human rights violations as the Indian state and Congress party bosses, and in pursuit of the reactionary aim of continuing the logic of the 1947 communal partition of the subcontinent by establishing a “Sikh” state.

Furthermore, it strikes me that Kashmeri and McAndrews’ work has a serious flaw. Relying heavily on anonymous sources within the intelligence establishment itself, they end up totally exonerating the Canadian Security Intelligence Service (CSIS). They point to misinformation campaigns carried out by Indian diplomats and intelligence agents, but seem totally blind to the capacity of the Canadian state to play the same game.

The recently concluded Air India trial revealed not only that the CSIS had Talwinder Singh Parmar, the chief organizer of the conspiracy, under heavy surveillance in the lead-up to the attacks (destroying much of this wiretap evidence shortly after the bombings), but also that they likely had an agent placed within the conspiracy. Nevertheless, CSIS was either unable or unwilling to prevent the horrific attacks.

This by itself gives both CSIS and the Canadian government an overwhelming interest in covering their tracks. And how much more so given that the Liberal government had just reorganized Canada’s national security apparatus, ostensibly to put an end to illegal police spying and dirty tricks, but with the real aim of creating a more sophisticated and powerful intelligence service?

Kashmeri and McAndrews' book tends to suggest that the Air India bombings could have been avoided (or at least that the investigation could have succeeded) had CSIS and the RCMP been better equipped and had their efforts not been obstructed by Canadian politicians looking to secure commercial relationships with India. In other words, the book gives unqualified support to the most antidemocratic institution of the Canadian state—the political police and national-security apparatus.

Whose interests are served by this political conclusion? Certainly not those of anyone who wants a full exposure of the Air India conspiracy. On the contrary, such an approach dovetails all too perfectly with the central aim of the Canadian government throughout the entire Air India affair: to protect the reputation of the Canadian Security Intelligence Service and prevent any public scrutiny as to how it uses its sweeping powers.

Sincerely,

David Adelaide



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