

# REVIEWS

Greg Waite

## THE ENEMY WITHIN The Human Cost Of State Surveillance In Aotearoa/New Zealand

Maire Leadbeater, Potton & Burton, NZ (2024)

It was a pleasure to read such a well written and interesting New Zealand book, available for \$40 in Whitcoulls, online, and in your library. Younger readers will get a great overview of State surveillance today, and how we got here. Older activists like me can enjoy Maire’s very balanced insights into the history of our local Left, with all its organisational quirks and characters.

- “The Enemy Within” is both thought provoking and timely, given the international context:
- normalised global data collection by corporations, available for State surveillance
  - the shift to remote warfare via intelligence-guided drone assassinations and bombings
  - demands for worldwide increases in military spending, to fund the big arms-exporting states
  - ramped up sales of surveillance and population-control systems to dictators
  - threats to the free speech and employment of critics of Israel and the USA
  - the potential for a permanent corporate takeover of the US State

It really does feel like the ground is shifting under our feet today. Most of that change is bad, but because it’s so bad I also get the feeling that clarity is growing around the changes we need to make. For example, I’ve recently read and reviewed in *Watchdog* some outstanding books about England and America’s repression in developing nations, closely tied to the interventions of their “intelligence” services to install military rule.

### The Pattern Is Clear

These organisations build a psychopathic internal culture which justifies and evolves new forms of murder and torture. Today it’s renditions and drones. Tomorrow, it looks likely to be the stifling of internal dissent. And we support them, providing locally gathered intelligence to our Five Eyes partners.

And what have we got from these organisations? They failed to detect real terrorist threats like the 1984 Wellington Trades Hall bombing, the 1985 *Rainbow Warrior* sinking and the 2019 Christchurch mosques’ attack. They target the wrong people including our own and overseas elected politicians, regularly provide leaks to support conservative misinformation campaigns and undermine democracy.

Maire shows the evolution of laws and oversight on State surveillance, and the improved public relations, but the flexibility of legal interpretation still leaves plenty of scope for abuse, while our systems of operational scrutiny are grossly inadequate.

The Security Intelligence Service (SIS) budget for 2021 was around \$100 million with 400 full time equivalent staff, while the Government Communications Security Bureau (GCSB) had 540 FTE (full time equivalent) staff in June 2023. Why are we misspending so many millions over so many years for so little benefit and no real accountability, while budget cuts send so many skilled workers overseas?

Maire recommends a break with the past, expanding the National Assessments Bureau (NAB) which currently sits under the Department of Prime Minister and Cabinet. Staffed by skilled public servants whose loyalty is to our Government, not the US and UK, the NAB provides assessments by combining open source intelligence, classified material and diplomatic engagement.

And Maire suggests responsibility for enforcement returns to the Police and the courts, with their built-in accountability procedures. This sounds like the perfect starting point for discussions on reforming our traditionally secret State surveillance and its subservience to the foreign policy of Western arms exporters. This is a big book, so I’ll close just by highlighting a few of the many strands of New Zealand history woven together here.

### Early Surveillance Of Māori Movements

“The Enemy Within” starts with World War I, when nearly 100,000 New Zealanders served in the war, and 18,000 died, or one in five. Princess Te Puea Hērangi, granddaughter of the second Māori king, led opposition to conscription in the Waikato, while Tūhoe prophet Rua Kenana discouraged Māori participation in the war.

After the war, surveillance of Māori movements that questioned the war continued, and included the pan-tribal Rātana movement formed in 1918. Rātana was seen as “a

serious new potential mode of subversion” given its unifying potential and the “possibility of an alliance with pakeha social-democratic and other organised labour movements”.

Subversion is a conveniently slippery term which here serves to undermine legitimate advocacy. Activists will recognise this familiar theme throughout the book’s history of surveillance; it’s always a loyal servant to vested interests. Other recurring themes are payments to undercover informants, lost jobs and promotions as a result of security assessments, targeted leaks and smear campaigns, spying on journalists and whistleblowers, and the role of New Zealand as a servant to UK/US interests and their client states.

### History Told Through Personal Stories

But equally this is a book about the people who created our early workers’ movement, the sometimes-quirky evolution of political parties, and the ongoing and natural advocacy of a diverse community, illustrated by a series of stories of “persons of interest”. Here the themes are campaigns for peace and against conscription and judicial executions, for unemployed and organised workers, for alternative political visions, for solidarity with the world’s oppressed peoples.

### It’s Personal

Maire asks early in the book how the Security Service (the original name of the SIS) justified putting her under surveillance at ten years old, and her brother Keith at 11. “We



Keith and Maire Locke (now Leadbeater) up to no good, around the time Special Branch started recording their activities.

were kids riding our bikes and playing with our friends, and while we might have heard the term ‘revolution’ I doubt we could have explained it. More than that, our parents and their communist colleagues were thoroughly inoffensive and peaceable people. Even as kids we were aware that they were part of a fringe movement with no capacity for imminent revolt of any sort”.

While reassured in a letter which accompanied the release of her 95-page SIS Personal File that she had never been regarded as a person of “security interest” in the same way that her parents were, Maire responds: “I do not accept that anyone in my family ever threatened State security. Moreover, the solidarity, anti-nuclear and anti-apartheid organisations I took part in should not have been spied upon. Such groups were and are a vital part of a healthy democracy”.

Fittingly, the book closes with the story of Maire’s brother Keith Locke\*, who died in 2024. Keith became the target of close surveillance from when he was a student in the 1960s and increased through the 70s and 80s when he was a national leader of the Socialist Action League, then the national coordinator of the Philippines Solidarity Network.

*\*Murray Horton’s obituary of Keith Locke is in Watchdog 167, December 2024, <https://www.converge.org.nz/watchdog/67/17.html> His obituary of Maire and Keith’s mother, Elsie Locke, is in Watchdog 97, August 2001, <https://www.converge.org.nz/watchdog/97/13.htm> And his obituary of their father, Jack Locke, is in Watchdog 84, May 1997, <https://www.scribd.com/doc/24211537/Watchdog-May-1997> Ed.*

Surveillance continued as he became involved in the Parliamentary politics of New Labour, the Alliance, and even after he was elected as a Green MP. A telling example is his involvement in a 2002 seminar organised by Students for Justice in Palestine. Two letters to the *NZ Herald* criticising Keith’s views are filed with the handwritten comment “Eeeexcellent!”

Does this mean the SIS had a hand in the letters, or just that some idiot had time on his hands? Keith pointed out the obvious - in a democracy the elected members of Parliament should not be spied on – and in 2011 agreement was reached that monitoring of MPs was no longer normal practice, though in exceptional cases the SIS will share supporting evidence with Parliament’s Speaker.

In an amusing/incompetent postscript, it emerged that a joint SIS/GCSB induction presentation used since 2013 had included Keith as a “threat” (misspelt as “treat”). The talking

point suggested that being a vocal critic of the agencies means you are a “threat” or a “syndrome”. Director-General Rebecca Kitteridge apologised, saying: “People who criticise the agencies publicly are exercising their right to freedom of expression and protest, which are rights that we uphold”. Kitteridge is better at PR, but the message and culture presented to incoming recruits is clear.

So, on a personal note I’d like to suggest in closing – when we do rethink surveillance, let’s think about a time when we monitor corporate and rich list tax avoidance and their political influencers. Why is this type of misconduct left behind closed doors? Governments have both a right and a duty to study, understand, and publish analysis of corruption, so we can create an informed debate about a fairer world.

*“The Enemy Within” extract about Murray Horton’s SIS Personal File is reprinted elsewhere in this issue. Ed.*