

The Enemy Within: The Human Cost of State Surveillance in Aotearoa/New Zealand.

By Maire Leadbeater.

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In December 1955, young Maire aged ten and her brother Keith aged eleven accompanied their mother Elsie to a meeting of the William Morris Group, a Christchurch-based organisation intended to provide ‘art for the people and by the people’. Elsie Locke and her husband Jack were also members of the New Zealand Communist Party, and Elsie had been under continual surveillance by the New Zealand Police since she first joined the party in 1933. Special Branch opened files for Maire and Keith in December 1955, for, as the ‘red diaper babies’ of two communist parents, they themselves were already marked as persons of interest.

Maire Leadbeater’s account of state surveillance in Aotearoa/New Zealand over the past hundred years is at heart a very personal story of her family, and of those informers (or ‘pimps’) and security officers who watched, recorded and commented on their daily lives. This is also an account of small groups operating at social and official fringes; on the one side the radicals, reformers and revolutionaries inspired by international ideologies and events to challenge the authority of government, and on the other those security officers questing for sedition, subversion or extremism at the ‘pliable margins’ of the law, beyond the normal reach of public or parliamentary scrutiny.

The title *The Enemy Within* is well chosen, as it neatly captures how each side viewed the other. Governments of the day were variously alarmed by perceived threats posed by Bolsheviks, communists, saboteurs, pacifists, fundamentalists, protestors and radicals within New Zealand. Members of many of these movements, in return, viewed the existence of security officials – whether in the police, the wartime Security Intelligence Bureau, or latterly the New Zealand Security Intelligence Service and the Government Communications Security Bureau – with mistrust and caution. Of course, as with the littlest doll in a Russian *matryoshka*, despite the millions of words and dollars expended on resistance and surveillance over the past century in New Zealand, the total number of people involved on all sides has always been relatively small.

Leadbeater has a cautionary and often grim story to tell. There is little light relief in this narration of movements, events and personal tragedies, from the Waihi Miners’ Strike and the Mau movement in Western Samoa, through depression and riots, war and pacifism, the 1951 Waterfront Strike, Vietnam War protest, the 1981 Springbok Tour, and finally the

¹ Disclaimer. Leadbeater has quoted from my own work on anti-communist purges in the New Zealand public service during the Cold War, unexpectedly placing me in the august company of Noam Chomsky. A maternal great uncle helped form the New Zealand Communist Party in 1921 and took delight in recruiting family members to unwittingly bring in subversive literature from Australia. My own work on security intelligence, espionage and New Zealand dates from a generation earlier than *The Enemy Within*. Based upon declassified Australian, United States, United Kingdom and – finally – New Zealand Security Intelligence Service archives, it can be found at www.kiwispies.com.

global war on terror and surveillance. A little levity can be found in the stories of evasion or counter-surveillance: Elsie Locke frustrating attempts by the police in the 1940s to raid her home, arrest her, or even follow her home from an office party. Leadbeater could 'hear my mother's laughter' when reading of a detective's frustration (p. 99). Kit Bennetts, then with the NZSIS, found himself being tailed through Wellington in 1976, before seeking sanctuary in the Taranaki Street police station (pp. 228-229).

The strength of *The Enemy Within* are those stories lifted from declassified surveillance files. Leadbeater provides case studies of her mother's history as a communist and social critic, together with that of her brother Keith, Dr William Sutch and the Rosenberg family. A chapter on anti-communist witch hunts within the public service during the 1950s provides details of the official repercussions for university students who produced their own newsletter of international news, or two diplomats who joined a social club for incautious conversations between like-minded people. Activists and protestors from succeeding generations are also featured, including Trevor Richards, Murray Horton and Owen Wilkes.

What is apparent throughout this study is the imbalance of information from the archives of the NZSIS. The stories of those who experienced surveillance are detailed from their personal files and augmented, wherever possible, with their personal memories. The officers who conducted the surveillance are, by contrast, conspicuously absent since their identities and activities remain classified. One can only hope that a biographer of the future may be able to tell the stories of some of New Zealand's security police – the long-serving Jim Nalder, for example, or 'Call Me Dave' Paterson.

This is also a consciously partisan account, intended to stimulate debate on the form and function of state surveillance when directed against society's critics. Since the work of the NZSIS and GCSB to counter extremism and terrorism fit within the global context of western hegemony, criticisms are reserved for Western – especially American – intervention. The excesses of Stalinism, or Soviet intervention in Eastern Europe are acknowledged, but only in passing. What is then missing from this study is a discussion of motivation – why individuals joined a communist party or a security service, what motivated activism or surveillance, and why successive governments continue to believe in the necessity for security, intelligence and surveillance. In essence, just who are our enemies within?

It is curious that, for all of the discussion of 'spies' in New Zealand, there is no mention of some of the highest-profile New Zealanders who have been suspected of working with Soviet intelligence. For instance, the section on anti-conscription campaigners in 1940 omits New Zealand Rhodes Scholar Ian Milner who left Wellington for Australia in early 1940, where he was later involved in a network of Australian government officials who passed classified material to the Soviets. Equally, no consideration is given to security or intelligence successes in New Zealand, such as the expulsion of Vladislav Andreyev and Nikolai Shtykov from the Soviet Legation in 1962 for having engaged in espionage, following a highly successful double-agent operation in Wellington.

Leadbeater reminds us that current debates regarding privacy, surveillance and data are in fact not new, and that the key question remains should such information even be collected in

the first place. As someone who was the subject of a lifetime of inconclusive surveillance, Leadbeater suggests that if surveillance is still necessary – and recent events in Christchurch and Bondi suggest that it is – then it is the New Zealand Police, not our security organisations, that are the most responsible and accountable government agency to henceforth undertake this work.

The Enemy Within is a thought-provoking re-examination of the respective roles of social critics and the state, canvassing the effects of surveillance on the surveilled in New Zealand from keyholes to keystrokes. This is not the final word on the topic but provides an accessible and stimulating perspective to the story of state surveillance in New Zealand, complete with copious footnotes to guide future researchers to some of the key primary and secondary sources. If read in conjunction with studies of the organisation and operation of state surveillance, such as Richard Hill and Steven Loveridge's *Secret History: State Surveillance in New Zealand 1900-1956*, or the official histories of the Australian Security Intelligence Organisation or the British Security Service (MI5), a wider appreciation of the still incomplete story of state surveillance in this country can be gained.