

LOCKE, STOCK BUT NO SMOKING BARREL

When Green MP Keith Locke requested his personal file from the SIS, he was appalled to find that his personal life, career and political activities have been under observation for the past 50 years - even after he entered parliament. Anthony Hubbard reports.

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THE SPIES have been watching Keith Locke since he was 11 years old. They kept a file on him during his many years as a red-hot Trotskyite and trade unionist. They noted that he drove a blue Morris 1000 and had a distinctive gold tooth. And they kept his file open even when he was a respectable MP.

The SIS intruded on his life for decades, monitored his "romantic attachments" and meddled in his employment, and it was all futile, says Locke. "The files show that in 51 years monitoring my activities [the last reference was in 2006], the SIS couldn't come up with any intention to engage in illegal activities or conspire with hostile foreign powers," he says. "It was all about monitoring my legitimate political activities."

How peculiar it is, seeing an old militant through the eyes of the spooks. "Locke was described by source as a pleasant but somewhat shy person," says one report, "who gesticulated with his hands in an animated fashion while speaking." There are plenty of compliments. Another SIS source described him as a "quiet, solid person. If you wanted to put your two bob on someone, you'd put it on Keith Locke".

It is too easy, says Locke, to dismiss these hundreds of pages as merely of historical interest. After all, the SIS still kept an eye on him when he was an MP. "Monitoring a sitting MP, purely because of the views he espouses, is an affront to our parliamentary system."

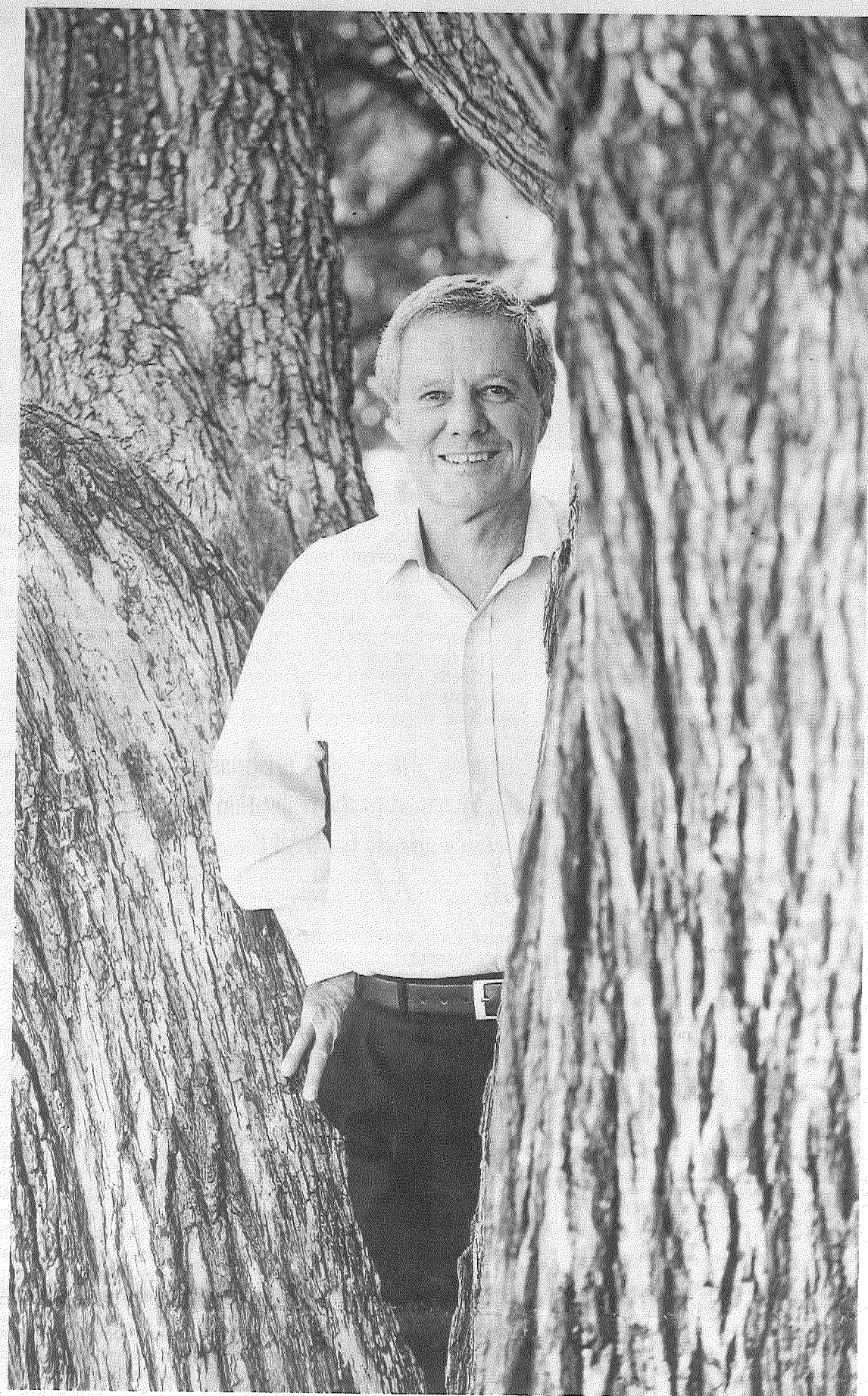
And the recent uproar over the police spying on protest and community groups, including Greenpeace, shows the state still meddles in the lives of law-abiding citizens, he says. Police informer Rob Gilchrist spied on climate change activists, animal rights protesters and opponents of the Iraq War. The SIS spied on anti-apartheid campaigners, trade unionists and opponents of the Vietnam War.

What, asks the MP, has changed?

Locke, 64, got his file under the SIS's policy of greater openness. The director, Warren Tucker, takes a freer and friendlier tone in dealing with the world than his predecessors. His covering letter to Locke hopes that he will find the file interesting and adds: "We would be interested in what you think of the accuracy, or not, of the reports and opinions on it."

"I'm grateful to the director," says Locke, showing the "distinctive gold filling in a front incisor" mentioned in SIS report No 21/37/3 on April 14, 1983.

In fact, most of the facts in his file are accurate, he says - although



Recent police spying shows that the state still meddles in the lives of law-abiding citizens, says Keith Locke.

Photo: Mark Coote

the political analysis is often unsophisticated and off-beam.

There is a kind of strange bond between spies and the spied-on. Locke was touched when Tucker sent him a note of condolence on the death of his mother, the writer and former communist Elsie Locke.

Now the MP hopes that "the new openness of the SIS in allowing people such as myself to get their files also represents a lessening of the surveillance of legitimate dissenters. However, we need a full inquiry into the serious democratic issues raised by these files, and a discussion about how we can make the service more accountable".

LOCKE'S OFFICIAL debut was on December 12, 1955, when the Police Special Branch - it did the spying before the SIS was set up - noted that he attended a William Morris social evening with his mother at the Christ-

church YWCA. Keith James Locke was 11.

Young Keith was bound to come to the attention of the authorities at an early age. His parents, Elsie and Jack Locke, were perhaps the most famous communists of their generation, although Elsie broke with the party after the 1956 Soviet invasion of Hungary.

In 1963 the spies noted that Keith, now active in the New Left Club at Canterbury University, took part in a demonstration at Harewood airport against the South African rugby league team. How were anti-apartheid protesters a threat to security? Other SIS files, released to the archives for the first time two years ago, reveal that the SIS was worried about "Communist influence" in the campaign to include

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Maori in All Black tours of South Africa.

The spies would no doubt argue that they needed to keep an eye on extremists. How

could they know whether talk about revolution was just talk, or actual plans?

Locke won't buy this. He had never advocated violence and nor had the groups he belonged to, such as the Trotskyite Socialist Action League. Nor did the spies ever find evidence of them plotting to do so. In fact, in one 1971 article, copied in the file, Locke explicitly argues against violence, criticising left-wing kidnappings in Quebec and Uruguay as "counterproductive".

Left groups joined the anti-apartheid and other organisations, he says, "because they believed in those

causes". And that belief turned out to be justified. New Zealand is now proud of its record in fighting racism.

The SIS kept a close eye on the Socialist Action League. Locke was "probably the outstanding leader", said a report in 1977. "He is treated with a lot of respect. He is experienced and capable and when he speaks everybody sits quietly and listens."

In 1971 it talked about the league's headquarters in Wellington. "Recently Locke and [another man] have had Yale locks fitted to all the rooms in the house. Apparently each lock has a different key."

It is clear, says Locke, what the point of all this was. The SIS wanted to know how it could burgle the house.

Much of the file is full of boring details of meetings, trips abroad, conferences, and even how much the league spent on its copying machines. There are physical descriptions of those who attended and details about whom they are married to, and political summaries, some of them vague. A 1972 report on a league meeting says one man "gave the source the impression of being a potential trouble-stirrer".

The SIS kept in touch with Locke's employers, especially when he was working at the troubled Gear Meat Works in Petone. One report in 1981 identifies him and other league members likely to sign on for the season. It also notes that another man under SIS surveillance "has also applied for employment, but source does not rate his chances of success highly".

Another report says: "Locke has been trying to obtain employment in the Wellington area, but he has been given such bad references by Gear that he no longer asks for them."

This suggests to Locke that the SIS and his employers were "conspiring with employers to reduce the influence of what they saw as strong trade unionists".

After all, Gear had not complained about his work at the plant - quite the opposite. He had been promoted. Did they prevent him getting work? Locke is not sure. "It's not something I can prove. When I didn't get a job at Dulux Paints, how was I to know whether it was because of 'bad references'?"

The group records his expulsion from the Labour Party in 1974 and the extraordinary public attack in 1980 on the league by the prime minister, Robert Muldoon. He commended the director of the SIS, Paul Molineaux, for exposing a plan by the league to infiltrate the Labour Party. "In this area of subversion," Muldoon said, "it will be the government's policy to expose these people."

Subversion, apparently, covered political campaigning within the Labour Party.

The file covers Locke's activity in the Latin American committee in the 1980s, and includes clippings of the expulsion from it of an SIS informer. There is much coverage of Locke's trips to the Philippines to support left groups. All of his overseas trips, including details of his passports, are included.

It bothers Locke that the SIS kept his file open even after he became a Green MP. He has long since renounced Marxism - he now likens the Socialist Action League to a religious sect - and describes himself as a "libertarian eco-socialist".

The file includes clippings about his activities as an MP, including the official Hansard report of his speech in parliament proposing a bill to increase oversight of the SIS. It also includes a copy of a biting letter about him - and about academic Paul Buchanan - to an

Getting your SIS file

The SIS says that last year it released personal information from its files to 26 people. It told 13 others that it could find no record of them.

So far this year 24 people have asked for their files. "At this stage it appears that about half of the individuals are unknown to the NZSIS," a spokesman told the *Sunday Star-Times*.

In 2003 the SIS adopted a policy that it would deal impartially with the information it released, "regardless of whether the information reflects unfavourably on it or shows it in a good light".

It will release files only to the individual or their family. It will never release information about court convictions, physical and mental health, financial circumstances or adoptions. "Under no circumstances will the NZSIS comment publicly on the contents of a personal file." It welcomes feedback and people can request it to correct any wrong information on its files.

The information it releases "needs to be viewed in historical context". Methods and information-collection priorities "have altered over the years as the nature and perceptions of threats to security have changed". Some of the personal material gathered in a different era "would not be collected today".

To ask for your file, write to: The SIS, PO Box 900, Wellington - or visit its website: www.nzsis.govt.nz.

Auckland newspaper. Someone in the SIS has written below it: "Eeeecxcellent!"

But Locke is most bothered by a file from 2003 criticising the MP's proposed visit to war-torn Sri Lanka, where he proposed to visit the area controlled by the Tamil Tigers (the LTTE), regarded by some governments as a terrorist organisation.

"It would suggest a level of naivety if Locke did not consider that the organisation and payment for this trip to war-affected areas in the north and east of Sri Lanka was not in some way connected with the LTTE... In fairness to Locke he most likely does want to meet both sides of the conflict to get a better idea of the situation but needs to raise this delicately with his hosts."

This file is not included in the documents released to Locke, but is quoted by Warren Tucker in his letter. It came from another SIS report, Tucker said, of which Locke was not the subject. An SIS spokesman said in a written statement to the *Sunday Star-Times* that the SIS "is not actively investigating any current Members of Parliament".

Locke says this isn't good enough. The SIS might not have been actively investigating his trip to Sri Lanka, he says. "But they are passing judgement on me and transferring that to my personal file. They are monitoring my activities and that is of concern."

An SIS personal file, he says, is maintained for someone "of continuing security interest, that is, there is some danger to the state in terms of their activities. It suggests they still consider me to some degree as someone to be kept an eye on."

"I think they should know from my file over the years that I don't represent any such thing. The things that I've done have been for the good of the country, not to the detriment of anyone."