Spooks and Scientologists:

Secrecy, Surveillance and Subversion in Cold War Australia 1954-1983

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**At a glance:** Hubbard Association of Scientologists aka Church of the New Faith aka Church of Scientology (ASIO File No. 3/2/834)

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The *Archives Act 1983* allows for all government files to be released after a thirty year moratorium. Section 37 of the act permits that certain folios (i.e. pages), mainly intelligence received from foreign sources, are *wholly exempted*, whilst others are *partially exempted* to block out the names of informers and ASIO operatives.
Aims

1. ASIO and the Australian Cold War

2. First Contact: Scientology and ASIO in the 1950s

3. ASIO and the Apostate: Phillip Bennett Wearne

4. ASIO and Accountability: Scientology and ASIO in the 1970s
A Cold War Problem:
The “Nest of Traitors” in the Department of External Affairs

Below: Ian Milner and Jim Hill – Alleged Russian Spies.

Report to President Truman, January 27, 1948.

“Indications have appeared that there is a leak in high government circles in Australia, to Russia. This may, in magnitude, approach that of the Canadian spy expose of last year insofar as high Australia government officials are involved.”
“[Evatt is] not a communist but being a complete political opportunist he hews to Communist Party line whenever it suits his political interests.”
Origins of ASIO

Below: Ben Chifley – Labor Prime Minister of Australia 1945-1949

Background to 1948 Intelligence Embargo.

2. U.S. diplomatic and intelligence paranoia (especially Naval Intelligence) about Communist influence in Australian Labor Party.
3. Inter service rivalry within the U.S. defence forces.
5. U.S. concerns about U.K.-Australia Joint Project to develop guided missile capabilities.
Directive for the Establishment and Maintenance of a Security Service (1949)

“...Its task is the defence of the Commonwealth from external and internal dangers arising from attempts at espionage and sabotage, or from actions of persons and organizations, whether directed from within or without the country, which may be judged to be subversive of the security of the Commonwealth.”

Note: This was slightly modified in July 1950 by Prime Minister Menzies.
Establishment of ASIO and Early Operations.

1. Established by Chifley under direction of Justice Geoffrey Reed of South Australian Supreme Court on March 16, 1949.

2. Election in 1949 brings Menzies government to power.


4. ASIO work on ‘The Case’
The Petrov Defection and its Aftermath.

Below: Evdokia Petrov escorted by armed Soviet agents at Sydney Airport.

Key Events


3. Souring of Relationship between ALP and ASIO (H.V. Evatt partially blamed ASIO for his May 1954 election loss)
Fellow Anti-Communists: Initial Contact between ASIO and Scientology (1956)

Below: Cover of *Brain-Washing: A Synthesis of the Russian Textbook of Psychopolitics*.

**First Contact**

April 16, 1956 Ronald Lindsay Chittock approaches Regional Security Officer A.E. Ellis at Department of Supply about printing and distributing manual.

Preliminary investigation in Melbourne found HASI “would not appear to be of any security interest.”

Colonel Spry on further contact: “...this organisation has no desire to discuss the booklet with Mr. Chittock.”
The Rise of Brain-washing Theory

Brain-washing in Red China (first published 1951).

Korean War (1950-1953)
Anti-Communist Fellow Travellers: Eric D. Butler

Butler began distributing *Brain-washing* through the *New Times* press from 1956.

Butler told ASIO in 1970:

“I met Hubbard in Rhodesia in 1966, just prior to him being removed from that country, and did not form a very high opinion of him. His movement may be, as some opponents charge, a money-making racket for Hubbard.”
Late 1950s and early 1960s

1. Scientology and communists (including Ken Dyer – See Chris Hartney this afternoon)


3. HASI media claims to be associated with ASIO in exposing communists.

4. Phillip Bennett Wearne and the ALP.
Memo 7813 Hubbard Association of Scientologists

“The Association is not considered to be subversive, but is of security interest and could have harmful effects on the public mind. It is probably the Association would exploit any contact with A.S.I.O. to their own advantage which might in turn reflect discredit on this organisation.”

“No contact with the Association is to be established and if a member of the Association telephones for an appointment, he is to be requested to forward his information in writing.”

Below: Phillip Bennett Wearne RAAF Enlistment Photo 1944
ASIO and the Apostle: Phillip Bennett Wearne

Below: The Legion of Space comic-book.

Below: The Legion of Space comic-book.

Background

1. WWII Service (RAAF) (“careless,” “full of his own self-importance.”)

2. Comic strip illustrator: Legions of Space.

3. Investment Scams.

4. ALP Publicity Officer.
Below: *The Legion of Space* comic-book.

### ALP Affiliation

1. Wearne’s company, Australian Trade Union Press Pty. Ltd., published 51 Trade Union and ALP journals across Australia.

2. 1958 – Wearne joins HASI.

3. 1961 – Wearne begins publishing *Probe*, distributes to all Federal parliamentarians and public service departments.
Below: Article from Probe (1961).

**SECURITY CHECKING MADE EASY**

A GOVERNMENT exists at least in part to protect its people from aggressors. The government can plan an efficient mechanism to combat an attack once the war has broken out. The security of a nation is the responsibility of its government. The government must plan to prevent war if possible and to wage war if necessary. The war machine is a complex web of weapons which require a great deal of coordination and communication between various branches of the government. The government must have a plan to deal with the threat of an attack. The Zone-Plan in the ALP

"PROBE can help you in your work by providing through its pages an up to date presentation of the latest advances in management techniques and administration methods – especially in the fields of communication of control – which can assist the solution of problems arising in Government organisations."

"We trust that you will find its articles of sufficient value to warrant your authorizing a subscription for every member of your staff."

Page Six — PROBE
ASIO on Wearne (1962)

Below: Phillip Bennett Wearne (1962)

ASIO Assessment, January 30, 1962

“There is little doubt that WEARNE is certainly a go-getter, one might almost say a con-man, who is prepared to approach anybody or anyone if he can see a chance of making a bit for himself.”
“The exact processing techniques used in this brainwashing is described in correspondence between myself and a psychiatrist, Dr. Fennessy and Dr. Cunningham Dax of the Mental Hygiene Commission (sic.), and I will make copies available if you require them.”
Sargant Visits Australia

August 14, 1962 – William Sargant gives the keynote address at the Centenary Celebrations of the University of Melbourne School of Medicine, entitled “Brainwashing” at the invitation of Dr. Eric Cunningham Dax.

Below: Details of Sargant’s Visit 1962.
Local Brainwashing Advocates

Early Australian Anti-Cultists.
In 1960 Alan Hill published the first Australian authored work on Brainwashing entitled:

*Modern New Tongues: Mental and Spiritual SLAVERY.*

Hill later became involved with Wearne and his Committee for Mental Health and National Security.
Australia’s first Anti-cult Group: The Committee for Mental Health and National Security

Below: 1964 Publication by Committee for Mental Health and National Security

Events.


Wearne became star witness at the Anderson inquiry which led to repressive legislation against Scientology in three Australian states.
Scientology Bans and Police Raids

Below: Newspaper headlines

- POLICE SEIZE SCIENTOLOGY MATERIAL
- Detectives Raid Cult HQ, Seize Papers
- Stamp out Scientology

Anti-Scientology Legislation


Scientology Act 1968 – Western Australia

Scientology (Prohibition) Act 1968 – South Australia.
ASIO on Wearne (1970)

Below: Publication of the Committee for Mental Health and National Security

ASIO Assessment - February 19, 1970

“He was and may still be an undischarged bankrupt and is something of a con-man in business. Wearne appears to suffer from psychoneurotic condition and consideration will be given to blacklisting. At next contact Wearne may be informed that his activities are of not concern but at same time he should be firmly discouraged from meddling on fringe of security.”
Wearne’s Death and the Mysterious Affidavit

Wearne died March 7, 1971, according to Australian Scientologists after an assault outside a nightclub.

Wearne swore an affidavit in Sydney on January 6, 1969 claiming possibly CIA interest in Anderson Inquiry and to have provided ASIO with Scientology documentation around August 1963 (this formed the basis of Garrison’s account of the Anderson inquiry).

(Note: Records indicate Wearne did not contact ASIO directly until July 1965 and not about Scientology. However, Wearne did contact Commonwealth Security Police (CSP) in November 1963 and seems to have confused the two organizations, ASIO did not have access to the CSP material which was sequestered in the Department of Immigration).
“Vermin!”: ALP left-faction members on ASIO

**Below:** Bob Gould – ALP member, bookstore owner and anti-war activist.

**Events**

1971 – National Conference of ALP in Hobart Bob Gould proposes a motion to adopt a policy of abolishing ASIO. AL votes narrowly (by one vote, that of leader Gough Whitlam) not to adopt this as a policy platform.

Ironically, Lionel Murphy was the chief left-faction member who argued that ASIO should **not** be abolished.
“It’s Time.”

Below: Gough Whitlam – Prime Minister of Australia 1972-1975

1972 – Whitlam elected to office (international intelligence community very unhappy)

1972 – Whitlam refuses to have his personal staff security vetted by ASIO.

February 15, 1973 – Attorney General Lionel Murphy registers Scientology as a recognized denomination under s. 26 the Marriage Act making Scientology bans in Victoria, South Australia and Western Australia redundant.

1974 – Whitlam publicly exposes CIA intelligence operations at Pine Gap (Northern Territory) and Nurrungar (South Australia).

November 11, 1975 – Gough Whitlam “Dismissed” as Prime Minister.
Suspicion of ASIO in Whitlam Government

Below: George Negus – Journalist and Former Press Secretary for Lionel Murphy

On Whitlam and Murphy reading ASIO files.

“Lionel Murphy had asked for the files of the six most dangerous or subversive people in Australia...looked at them and laughed, and said to the bloke ‘I know these people. They are not subversives, they’re old fashioned marxists whom you needn’t worry about. Can you get me some real subversives? Some Russians who are in the woodwork out there?’...When he [Murphy] told Whitlam they both laughed – and they seldom laughed together.”
Croatian Revolutionary Brotherhood (Ustasha)

Below: Aftermath of Ustasha attack on Yugoslav travel agency in Sydney, September 18, 1972.

The ASIO Double-Standard

ALP and others believed (with good reason) that ASIO had a double-standard, harassing anti-war demonstrators whilst ignoring right-wing Croatian nationalists setting off bombs in city streets (23 bombings between 1963-1972).
The ASIO “Raid”


ASIO Accountability

March 16, 1973 – Murphy and the Australian Federal Police “raided” ASIO headquarters in Melbourne, after fears about a possible Ustasha attack planned for the visit of Yugoslav Prime Minister Džemal Bijedić and that ASIO were concealing information from him.

This to the calling of the Royal Commission on the Intelligence Services under Justice in order to examine the behavior of Australia’s intelligence community.
Royal Commission into the Australian Intelligence Services (RCIS)

Below: Justice Robert Hope.

Events
August 21, 1974 – Whitlam establishes RCIS.

RCIS reported to the Fraser government in 1977 and was highly critical of ASIO (though recommended extending its powers subsequent to internal reform).
Scientology’s Response to Establishment of the RCIS

Letter to Director General of ASIO
Peter Barbour (August 29, 1974)

“It has come to our notice that your dossier system contains information disseminated in Victoria by the late Phillip Bennett Wearne and others. Such data remaining on your file, is a source of false, defamatory and damaging statements in respect of our Church and its Australian membership.”

Note: ASIO checked all their files before refusing Scientology’s request to view them to ensure that they were acting within their charter (Justice Hope later slammed ASIO for its poor record keeping).
The Scientology Submission to RCIS

“The Church respectfully submits that it has tendered evidence that clearly shows that ASIO was involved in covert intelligence operations which deliberately lead (sic.) to the Inquiry into Scientology [i.e. the Anderson Inquiry]; that it played a major role in the Inquiry itself, and that it, via Mr. Galbally [Victorian ALP Leader who instigated Anderson inquiry], had a prime influence over the Inquiry proceedings itself, and the resulting report.”
Justice Hope on Scientology Allegations

“I found that ASIO had informed itself in the past about scientology by collecting available information and that it made inquiries of overseas sources. *It did not conduct any form of surveillance.* ASIO notified relevant authorities that the group was not of security interest for the purposes of the Act.”


(Note: this was not published until the second RCIS was held beginning in 1983, this statement appeared in the 1985 Report, Hope had neglected to include his original investigation in the first Reports in the late 1970s).
Over the course of the 1970s, as revelations from the RCIS slowly became public, opposition to ASIO grew, especially amongst left-wing activists. These activists founded groups like CAPP (Committee for the Abolition of Political Police) and staged protests outside ASIO buildings. Scientology joined in with its own group Society for the Protection of the Privacy of the Individual (SPPI) in 1976.
Society for the Protection of the Privacy of the Individual (SPPI)

SPPI Activities (1976-1979)
1. Protests outside ASIO Regional Offices
2. Pamphlet Campaigns
3. Lobbying against *ASIO Bill* 1979 which gave ASIO more powers.

Below: SPPI Pamphlet
Scientology and SPPI had frequent contact with Ananda Marga from the mid 1970s to express support for the group for what both considered undue intelligence harassment.

Scientology partially funded the legal defence of the ‘Yagoona Three’, three Ananda Marga members charged with planning to bomb the home of a right-wing activist in 1978.

The ‘Yagoona Three’ were convicted in 1979 but eventually pardoned in 1985 (though one was later re-tried, convicted and then acquitted on appeal in 1991).
“…the next target will be the Church of Scientology.”

Below: High Court of Australia, Canberra.

The Affidavit of James Patrick Cusick.

The document attached to the affidavit was a real ASIO memo and led to much consternation within ASIO about its leakage. Moreover, ASIO noted that the affidavit contained real knowledge of operational practices of ASIO unknown to the general public.
1. The Cusick Affidavit (leaked ASIO-NSW SB document).

2. “Unexplained interferences”: stolen mail, phone-lines being cut, tampering with motor vehicles, house break-ins, alleged surveillance outside houses, cancelled travel bookings to anti-ASIO protests.

Below: Church of Scientology Ideal Org Sydney.
Murphy’s Dissent

“Because of the experience that secret organizations of this kind from time to time misuse their powers in relation to individuals and institutions, it is essential that the judicial process be exerted, no doubt with caution, but if occasion warrants it, firmly, to keep the organization and officers within the law.”
Tentative Conclusions

1. Scientology was not considered “subversive” or a serious security threat and figured low on ASIO priorities.

2. The claim that ASIO played a major part in state legislation against Scientology is not born out by the evidence, especially as this pertains to the role of Phillip Wearne.

3. Scientology’s beliefs that it was under surveillance became a self-fulfilling prophecy, especially when it became involved in the 1970s campaign to make ASIO more accountable.

4. Who watches the watchers? Today ASIO is even less accountable.
“Who watches the watchers?”
(Juvenal, Satires VI.347-8)
Archival Files

For citation details see:

NAA: A6122, 2608.
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NAA: A6122, 2612
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NAA: A10074; 1979/73
NAA: A10074; 1980/42
NAA: A10074; 1980/77
Select Bibliography