SECURITY AGENT ON CAMPUS

By Roger Wilde

An officer in the Security Service has attempted to recruit university students to report on the activities of the Committee on Vietnam and other organisations.

The first approach was made to a university student before the academic year began.

The second approach is fully substantiated.

The officer, Mr Rex J. Banks, made a telephone call to a third-year student at Victoria University in the first week of the university term.

The two were formerly students at St. Pat's, Silverstream, together.

The student, who declined to reveal his name, said that during the conversation Mr Banks identified himself as a member of the Security Service.

Mr Banks then suggested to the student that he join certain organisations, such as the Committee on Vietnam, and "report" on their activities for the Security Service.

Mr Banks stated that he was not asking the student to report on organisations within the university.

The student immediately refused. He was then advised by Mr Banks to "forget the conversation ever took place."

The student concerned contacted the National Affairs Officer of the Victoria University Students' Association, Mr Peter Cullen, and discussed the matter with him.

Mr Cullen, acting without the knowledge of his informant, gave a rough outline of the situation to Messrs Wilde and Logan of SALIENT.

He gave little information which would lead to the identification of any persons involved.

The following morning, Mr Cullen advised Mr Logan that the story he had told him was a "pack of lies."

REX BANKS

He made a comment to the same effect to Mr Wilde later that day.

Three days later he told Mr Wilde he would be in a position to give him "all the names you require" within a "few days."

The information was not made available to SALIENT by the time Easter Council of NZUSA was convened at Christchurch.

It is understood from delegates to the council that the matter was raised at Constituents Commission.

It was discussed "in committee" however.

On the Wednesday April 19th, the President of the Victoria University Students' Association, Mr Gerard Curry, resolved to arrange a meeting with the director of the Security Service, Brigadier H.E. Gilbert.

"I wanted to obtain an assurance from Brigadier Gilbert that if there were any security agents on campus, they would be withdrawn," Mr Gerard told SALIENT.

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He was to arrange this meeting when the President of NZUSA, Mr Peter Rosler returned from overseas.

Last Monday, April 14th, Mr Cullen was interviewed by the editor of SALIENT, Mr Wilde, who accused him of acting irresponsibly in his capacity as a student representative on Executive.

At this stage SALIENT was aware of approximately 45 people who had learned of the situation from Mr Cullen, either first-hand, or in some cases second-hand.

Mr Cullen returned to an Executive meeting in progress and made a statement 'in committee'.

In view of the increasing urgency of the situation, Mr Curry decided to go ahead alone with his plan of seeing Brigadier Gilbert.

On the afternoon of Wednesday April 16th, Mr Curry had a meeting with a senior member of the staff at Security.

On the same day, SALIENT received more than 15 inquiries from the news media seeking confirmation of rumours about the security service.

This morning, the New Zealand Herald printed a brief story about the rumours.

The Vice-Chancellor of Victoria University, Dr D.B.C. Taylor, asked to comment late last night, said, "This sort of activity in the university is quite inconsistent with the basis principles of a university."

It was decided that no advantage would accrue from delaying publication in the hope of Mr Curry securing commitment from Security Service so a special issue of SALIENT was authorised.

The name of the student contacted by Mr Banks has been withheld for it would involve him in unnecessary publicity and perhaps prejudice his future career. The name of a person associated with the Security Service, who assisted in the recruitment of Mr Banks (among others) has also been withheld. This is because he has a son at University who, to the best of our knowledge is merely embarrassed by the actions of his father; and it is similarly considered undesirable to expose him to publicity.

Editor.

Fellow Student Comments

Last night I found out that one of the people who had been in Political Science classes with me for the last two years is now a security agent. He never gave any evidence that he was inclined towards the kind of cynical deviousness that being in the employ of the Security Service necessarily implies: he was quiet spoken, polite, apparently reasonable, and taciturn.

It almost goes without saying that the penetration of political spies is a total denial of the principle of academic freedom, and that academic freedom is one of the most valuable things that we have in this country.

But it comes as no great surprise to me to learn of the presence of such an agent at Vic. Just a slight shock to discover that he was actually in my classes for two years. It is no great surprise because the most important fact, as I see it, is that the Establishment is sickly-scared of freedom, and scared of the university in particular. So it sends its spies up here.

I don't care how scared the Establishment is, but I am concerned that their secret agents are allowed to step onto any campus in the country, and seek to undermine the freedom that we have. They should be absolutely prohibited. It is essential that they be exposed to the public gaze as soon as it is known who they are.

Hugh Fyson.
Student Recruitment to Continue...

The Security Service has been questioned concerning allegations of Security activity at Victoria University.

The President of the Victoria University of Wellington Students' Association, Mr Gerard Curry, yesterday spent two hours at security headquarters discussing campus activity.

"An officer of the Security Service agreed that graduates or senior students are approached from time to time," Mr Curry said. "This was with a view of recruiting them as career officers of the Service."

"The officer denied that students were induced to become agents for the purpose of spying on fellow students."

"I was informed it is Service policy (strictly in accordance with the recommendations of the Hutchison Commission) that members who attend university are not to report on students or university matters."

Mr. Curry was told that where a member of the Security Service enrols at a University the Vice-Chancellor was always advised of his ties with the Service.

Mr. Curry was refused a guarantee from the Security Service that the university would be outside the scope of the service.

"The officer was adamant that where there was good and proper cause the Service would be duty bound to make enquiries at the university," said Mr. Curry.

"It was further made clear that the Service intends to continue recruiting graduates as career officers in order to maintain an effective organisation."

Mr. Curry said that repugnance to security activity on campus takes two forms. The first is a disbelief that in a country like New Zealand there be any need for such a service at all.

"A large number of students view the Service as an indictment on our open society. For these students even the recruitment of new staff is obnoxious."

"The second is a deep hurt at the thought of student reporting on student in an institution of free enquiry."

"At university ideas and attitudes of individual students are almost invariably going through formative changes. Reporting of the various whims to Security is regarded by all as abhorrent."

"The Security Service informs me that this student-spying-on-student ritual does not occur. I have no evidence to suggest the contrary. In the present controversy the only substantial evidence relates to the attempted recruiting of a student to become a career officer of the Service and to a separate approach to a student to do the specialised work."

"This latter approach as far as I am aware was not directly connected with the university or student activities. No doubt this could be confirmed by the person approached."

"My discussions with Security were at all times polite and frank."

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previous statements by security

"The Security Service does not have 'security agents' established at universities in New Zealand to study university activities nor has the Service any interest in everyday campus activities... Nevertheless, the Service must retain its right, as in the past, to instruct its staff to make inquiries at a university if there is reason to believe that there is a matter of Security interest...It has a duty to follow Communist and Communist front activities and the possibility of espionage wherever these may occur."

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The function, as we see it, of a New Zealand security service should be to prevent efforts to subvert our political system. Our system is ostensibly democratic. Perhaps the most clear expression of the philosophy of democracy is embodied in the Declaration of the Rights of Man and of Citizens' recognized and declared by the French National Assembly at the time of the Revolution. Two of the Rights of Man are particularly relevant to the events outlined in this special issue of SALIENT. They are:

10. No man ought to be molested on account of his opinions, not even on account of his religious opinions; provided his avowal of them does not disturb the public order established by law.

11. The unrestrained communication of thoughts and opinions being one of the most precious Rights of Man, every citizen may speak, write, and publish freely; provided he is responsible for the abuse of this liberty in cases determined by the law.

We believe that these words are held to be true by most New Zealanders, even today. Citizens should have the right to hold whatever views they choose -- whether these be racist, communist, fascist or anything else -- and the right to disseminate, by any means, these ideas; provided that the expression of their ideas does not conflict with the rights of other members of society. There have been many instances where free speech has threatened the rights -- including freedom of speech itself -- of others in society. In these cases, somebody must determine whether a threat is sufficiently great to justify denial of right. If a man were to attempt to persuade New Zealanders to exterminate our Jewish population -- and had some prospect of success -- a conflict of rights would arise. In such a case, the rights of one man would have to be subordinated to the rights of others. The basis for determining the ranking of rights is provided in utilitarian principles.

The raison d'être of a university, in Western society at least, is the free exchange of ideas. As it is implicit in the concept of democracy that man is a rational being, it is in the universities -- which are considered the primary focus in society of rational thought -- that democracy is most clearly evident. However this view of the university is clearly contrary to the concept of democracy. Democracy implies perceiving all men as rational beings -- not just the members of universities.

We cannot, therefore, raise any arguments against the activities of Security Service personnel in universities which will not have equal application to society at large. However, the presence of a security service recruiter on this campus suggests that the service is unaware of what it is that it should be defending. These activities cannot help but inhibit the free exchange of ideas. And if the free exchange of ideas cannot be permitted to take place in universities we will be unable to say -- even of this special preserve -- that any real suggestion of democracy exists in New Zealand.

S. A. & D. H.

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