

ASIO, Nazis, and
the Anti-Communist
Diaspora in So-
Called 'australia'

Taken from chapter 12 and 10 of Australia's Spies and their Secrets by David McKnight. The author's perspective is by no means radical or revolutionary, however it is one of few works on the subject that is informative and not pure propaganda.

Made on occupied Wurundjeri country during a time of increased militancy and state repression, 2026.

Fuck the spook! Fuck state! Land back!

[There have been] several cases in which men in Australia had nominated women in Poland as their fiancées for entry to Australia; they had no personal acquaintance with these women having met them through the good offices of the Modern World Club which runs a 'lonely hearts' bureau. It was felt that this type of sponsorship . . . offered opportunities to hostile intelligence agencies to infiltrate agents into Australia.

ASIO memorandum, 21 June 1962¹

BETWEEN 1946 AND 1959, 1.2 million people migrated to Australia in one of the greatest mass movements of people in modern times. Most were from the United Kingdom but a significant minority, including some 200 000 refugees from wartime Europe, were non-British. In the idiom of the time they were described as 'aliens', a word which reveals much about Australia's historic xenophobia. This created a major security problem in the eyes of the Menzies government, the military establishment and the leaders of ASIO. Australia and its new ally the United States, believed the chances of war with USSR were quite high. If war broke out, the qualities of patriotism and loyalty would be at a premium. Less reliance could therefore be placed on aliens, particularly those from countries now behind the Iron Curtain. With this in mind, defence planners decided that some 10 000 of them would have to be arrested and interned—yet most of those 'enemy aliens' headed for behind barbed wire were staunch anti-communists from Estonia, Latvia, Byelo-Russia, Poland, Hungary and the USSR itself.

War fears also ensured that ASIO officers stationed in embassies around the world vetted potential migrants before they walked up the gangway of a ship bound for Australia. Often the decisions of these officers about who was unsuitable were influenced by judgments of the local secret police agencies in countries such as Italy, Greece, Spain and Germany.

Among the migrants and refugees who passed the 'security screening' were a number of war criminals and members of fascist organisations. Some of these from the Croatian community, went on a violent bombing spree in

Australia from the mid 1960s. Others were only discovered when journalists and historians began to examine official files of the Cold War from a distance of 30 years.

After several years residence 'aliens' were permitted to seek naturalisation (that is, become Australian citizens). Here too, a political test was imposed with many being rejected for taking part in perfectly legal political activities. If migrants wished to sponsor relatives for settlement in Australia they were vetted and if they 'failed' they were denied the chance to bring out others. British migrants who wished to sponsor relatives for government-assisted passage (the so-called 'ten pound' migrants) were vetted by ASIO and if they were 'adversely known' their relatives were rejected.²

Perhaps most draconian of all was the fact that migrants who wished to leave Australia temporarily then return were also vetted when they applied for a 're-entry visa'. Normally, most migrants made sure they had this visa before they left. Those who failed to obtain clearance to re-enter were in a very real sense prisoners in their adopted land. Those who departed without the visa and then tried to re-enter were kept out—with profound consequences for their personal lives as we shall see.

Most of all, unlike native-born dissidents, non-British migrants did not have the protection of citizenship. Because of this peculiar vulnerability members of migrant communities probably suffered most from the vetting system's unfairness and its secretiveness. Quite apart from its injustice, this system of security checking ensured that the long-term political beneficiaries of it were the Liberal and Country Parties and the Democratic Labor Party (DLP) whose electoral support was swelled by the anti-communist migrant communities.

The first line of defence in war planning was the political *cordon sanitaire* thrown around Australia by ASIO officers operating under the cover of the Department of Immigration. In May 1951 ASIO established itself in The Hague which remained headquarters for Europe until ASIO relieved MI5 of screening in 1956 and HQ was set up in London. German and Greek offices were set up in January 1952 and others soon followed. In The Hague at least, ASIO liaison officers initially checked on Dutch ex-Nazis trying to emigrate but in countries such as Greece and Italy where the Left had fought and lost major post-war political battles, the prime emphasis was to screen out alleged communists.

The Rome post was set up in June 1951 and although the Italian Constitution banned the passing of penal or security information to representatives of foreign governments, this was ignored. To carry out their work in Rome, for example, ASIO officers had to rely largely on the provincial police. Not only were these bodies riddled with men who received their training under fascism, they were also incompetent. One ASIO officer who served in Rome recalled receiving security information which had been based on local police reports from a rural village:

It was sometimes terrible what they did in these tiny villages. At one stage there was [an applicant for migration] who was reported for attending a [communist] meeting, and for some reason I decided to interview him. He told me that he wasn't even in the country at the time, that he was in Switzerland. I got back to the security service and they wrote back said 'yes he was [in Switzerland] Sorry. Full stop'.³

The Rome office would also interview Yugoslav refugees held in camps outside Trieste. One officer recalls the penalty migrants paid for being truthful.

One chap had been in the camp for five months because he admitted to joining the Communist Party as a foreman in a factory. So as far as the other countries were concerned [which recruited refugees] he could stay there. When I interviewed him he was one of the truthful applicants. Others just stated [probably untruthfully] 'I'm just a farmer, I didn't go to school and I wasn't a member of youth organisation.' So I cleared [the factory foreman]. I thought, 'this man is truthful'.⁴

Another officer later recalled: 'The effectiveness is anybody's guess. We went through the motions, although as we became more familiar, we got better.' Certainly the 1987 Menzies Report into war criminals notes that a number of war criminals entered Australia through the International Refugee Organisation camps at Bagnoli (Naples) and Trieste.

Six years after it began, the secretary of the Immigration Department, T.H. Heyes, presented an overview of the criminal and security screening system to his minister, Athol Townley.⁵ The aim, he said blandly, was to ensure that migrants 'do not have any background of a type which would militate against their successful absorption in the Australian community'. The biggest headache was the screening of British migrants. MI5 was prepared to screen school teachers, future government workers and a number of other categories but balked at screening the majority of the tens of thousands who left each year. Heyes told Townley this led to ASIO's senior liaison officer having to obtain some information on 'an "old boy" basis'. Sweden's neutralist stance made it hard to collect any information at all but in Denmark and Holland the governments were helpful in screening their own citizens. '[The Danes] regard it as important that every Danish migrant should be a credit to his country of origin and are anxious to avoid the migration of undesirables.' In Germany every person was obliged to carry extensive papers and security screening there was 'very comprehensive'. In Greece 'it is noteworthy that the Greek Government is itself particularly sensitive to subversive elements in view of its recent history' and 'very close liaison had been established with the Greek Security Organisation'. In Malta, Heyes noted, in 1956 30 161 people had been screened and 148 rejected on security grounds.

Heyes declared that he was pleased with the system as it operated in 1957. The pressure on him at that time mainly came from mindless anti-migrant groups who seized on crimes committed by 'new Australians' to

attack the migration system as such. Heyes comforted his minister with the knowledge that with screening 'experience has proved beyond doubt that any errors in judgement have usually been on the side of too strict rather than too lenient decisions'.⁶

However the screening system had a political blindspot. Almost as soon as refugees and Displaced Persons began to arrive in Australia a number of war criminals and leading Nazis were identified. In December 1949 the CIS drew up a list of eleven concentration camp guards, Gestapo informers, members of execution squads and collaborationist police units responsible for massacres.⁷ That same month, an education officer at Bonegilla Camp alerted his superiors to the presence of a 'Popoff' who was 'a junior minister in the Yugoslav Quisling government'.⁸ Popoff's, whose real name was Ivanovic, was indeed a senior Nazi collaborator. When the Yugoslav Government asked for his extradition, Australian immigration officials simply lied about his presence and thenceforward denied all assistance requested by Yugoslavia in tracking war criminals.⁹

The allegations about Nazi migrants had begun to appear in the Australian press in 1948 and Spry, as then Director of Military Intelligence, despatched two Military Intelligence officers, Captain Keith Turbayne and Captain Howard Miller, to devise guidelines for Australia's own system of screening to keep out 'political undesirables'.¹⁰ In this he had the support of Prime Minister Ben Chifley who threatened to 'send back' subversives or seditious migrants.¹¹ Spry and his two officers played a crucial role in developing the migration screening policy which operated for decades. Spry's directive to them defined security screening not as a process which would, for example, exclude former Nazis but rather 'to minimise the risk of espionage in Australia'. This emphasis was then spelt out by ordering the men to devise procedures to oppose the entry into Australia by persons: 'a) who are or could possess attributes of intelligence workers; b) who could foster subversion; and c) whose backgrounds suggest unsuitability for assimilation into Australian community.' As well Spry asked his men to 'initiate liaison arrangements with the British, American and French intelligence agencies [and] unofficially you will keep me informed of the matters of general intelligence interest generally...'

The mission resulted in guidelines which enabled the new security screening procedures to pick up Nazis more effectively. The new emphasis on possible espionage and subversion soon meant that members of communist parties (many of whom were wartime allies, rather than war criminals) became the main targets. In any case, the guidelines for exclusion of members of the Nazi Party were watered down. In 1950 mere membership of the Nazi Party was grounds for exclusion from migration. In February 1952 (on the eve of German mass migration) Spry suggested to his chief screening officer that perhaps a distinction could be made between the leadership and rank and file of the Nazi Party, a suggestion which was

implemented by April. By 1955 membership of the Nazi Party was 'not of itself ground for security objection'.¹²

In parallel, members of fascist organisations began to be used as informers for ASIO. It is indisputable that throughout the decades following its formation ASIO extensively used anti-communist migrants, *including known war criminals*. The clearest case concerned Milorad Lukic and Mihailo Rajkovic, the former a Gestapo informer and the latter a collaborator with the commandant of a Nazi prisoner of war camp. Yugoslavia labelled them both war criminals and requested their extradition in May 1951. External Affairs was reluctant to accede to this request and so was ASIO. Spry made it clear that both men were 'unceasing in their campaign against Communism and can and do assist ASIO to the limit of their ability'.¹³

An official inquiry in 1987 into the arrival of these war criminals, stated that security screening for Displaced Persons was largely in the hands of the International Refugee Organisation and the British, French and American intelligence services. The IRO process was corrupt and adverse reports could be avoided it said. Allied intelligence services used captured Nazi records which were extensive for Germans but were 'useless' in flagging the Nazi collaborators in places such as Croatia, the Ukraine, the Baltic countries and Hungary.¹⁴ It was from this latter group of countries that most war criminals in Australia arrived. That they 'slipped through' at all is also surprising considering that the original motivation for vetting was seen to be a mechanism for stopping precisely such people.¹⁵ While it is certain that many collaborationist Nazis slipped through for these reasons, it is also likely that Western intelligence services assisted a number with false identities to allow them to settle in Australia. Certainly similar arrangements exist today covering the protection of witnesses and informers of intelligence and police forces.

The second line of defence in war planning regarding migrants was the planned internment of 'enemy aliens' and subversive migrants at the outbreak of war.¹⁶ Within ASIO the plan was carried out by B1(c), a section of Counter-Subversion Branch which dealt with migrants and aliens. It would provide lists of names and addresses to state police who would make the arrests on that fateful dawn. The unfortunate arrestees would then be interned in camps hastily erected and guarded by the Army.

The prime group of migrants to be interned were the so-called 'enemy aliens' as we have seen in the previous chapter. Many of the 'enemy aliens' recorded on ASIO's 'Special Index of Aliens' were in fact anti-communists who had fled 'enemy countries' and had necessarily sought a passport in order to travel overseas.

To carry out its responsibility, ASIO worked closely with the Department of Immigration. The *Aliens Act* compelled all aliens to register with the department and then notify them of any changes in address, job or marital status. In Immigration the staff of the Aliens Registration section passed on

the registration documents of 'enemy aliens' and kept ASIO informed on a week by week basis of changes of address notified by aliens.

This detailed recording of 'enemy aliens' created a bureaucratic monster. As the number of 'enemy aliens' mounted year by year and existing migrants from 'enemy countries' changed addresses, got married or otherwise disappeared 'off the screen' the officers from Immigration and ASIO scurried around sending back and forth pieces of paper with which they hoped to track the myriad human movements. Whenever an error occurred it was necessarily on a giant scale. Eighteen months after ASIO and Immigration began to compile the Special Aliens Index it was found that mistakes in the registration form which aliens had to complete on arrival meant that 'a large number of aliens who should be considered for internment . . . would escape being considered for it'.¹⁷ As well, a number of migrants were mistakenly listed for internment whose passports were issued by emigre anti-communist 'governments' of Estonia, Latvia and Lithuania based in the West.¹⁸

The political basis for internment in an emergency was directed solely at the Left. On one occasion when a regional director raised the question of possible Japanese espionage, Spry told him: 'you are advised firstly, that no priority is attached to the investigation of Japanese activities in Australia. Any incidents suggesting espionage by Japanese should, of course be reported to Headquarters. Secondly, it is not proposed at present to classify Japanese as potential enemy aliens nor to include them in the enemy alien index.'¹⁹ A 1951 decision on 'Aliens (Non Enemy)' ordered that 'all those with an adverse pro-communist security record should be listed automatically . . .' but that 'it is not intended at this stage to intern former Nazis and Fascists'.

Internment was, of course, government policy. In September 1951, the Attorney-General, Senator Spicer and the Crown Solicitor, Professor Bailey met Spry to hammer out problems with internment. On the category of 'enemy aliens' Spry noted that there were 7000 'of whom little, if anything, is known. They are the ones who worry us. Each of them will have to be made the subject of a separate investigation.' Spry tried to offload this onto the state police arguing that they would have to carry out any arrests later on. The investigation, he suggested, would consist of a two-question loyalty test: *Do you intend to be naturalised?* and *Do you owe allegiance to your country of origin?*

Spicer was not happy with this. 'The only thing I boggle at is the police doing the questioning.' Professor Bailey began to niggle at internment itself: 'If a man were not much more than a bit leftish, he might be alright at Mildura picking oranges. Wouldn't it be better to have him there than interned?'²⁰

In succeeding years Spry had no doubt about internment but was concerned about the ever-increasing bureaucratic task of keeping up-to-date tabs on aliens. In April 1955 he raised again the question of police conducting a loyalty test on Russian, Baltic and other enemy aliens. His memo at

the time also sets out some interesting demographics. There were 4092 enemy aliens who had been granted a passport after their country had turned communist. In this group Russians, Yugoslavs and Czechs were the biggest group. A second category comprised 573 people who had an adverse security record since arriving in Australia. Apart from the three nationalities already mentioned, left-wing Italians figured prominently on the lists.

In 1957 Spry finally changed the method of identifying aliens for the big round up. Rather than the previous method of blanket categories according to the date and location when an 'enemy alien' was issued with a passport, he decided in January that 'internment by personal qualification' would be used. He told Heyes that:

It was felt that the possession of a passport which an immigrant obtained for leaving his country, was not a logical basis for assuming he still remained loyal to its government. Instead, a recommendation for internment should be based on either:

- a) an adverse security history, here or overseas, or
- b) reasonably substantial indication, specific in each case, that an alien from a Communist-dominated country retained allegiance to its government.²¹

In a letter to his regional directors explaining the policy, Spry said it was 'essential' in light of the growing new Australian population 'and the important section of public opinion which it provides, that the guiding principles of action regarding internment should be as liberal as possible, and such as would receive public support, subject to the over-riding consideration of the security of the Commonwealth'.²² The practical effect of this was shown when ASIO next submitted tallies to the Directorate of Military Intelligence. From a total of 8032 aliens and their dependants in 1956 the figure dropped to 2220 in December 1958.²³ At the same time the government was moving to cut the cost of the elaborate system of registration and monitoring of aliens which was run by Immigration on which depended ASIO's system of blanket categorisation according to passport issue, leading one to query whether liberality and public opinion was in fact the guiding factor. In any case the War Book planning for internment continued at least until 1971.

Migrants on the internment lists of ASIO, the police and the Army were of course ignorant of all of this. They knew however that they suffered a number of injustices. Part of war planning in the early 1950s also involved the denial of anything but the lowest grade public service jobs to 'aliens'. Australian citizens expected to work with documents graded secret could do so after they were vetted, but a blanket ban on the employment of aliens in such jobs was imposed.²⁴ When aliens applied for citizenship, a political test was imposed. From the early 1950s whispers began in migrant communities that such tests were being used to determine who was granted citizenship. It soon became apparent that there was a systematic denial of

citizenship to left-wing migrants but not to many former Nazis and members of extreme anti-communist organisations.

Mick Tsounis was a Greek migrant who arrived in Australia in 1938, aged eleven and settled in Adelaide. In 1953 Tsounis applied to be naturalised. The Immigration official who interviewed him was impressed. He wrote on the application before forwarding it: 'He is an excellent type and very keen to become an Australian citizen. He has a good knowledge of the responsibilities and privileges of Australian citizenship. The application is recommended.'²⁵ Apart from a fifteen shilling traffic fine, he had committed no offence. Shortly afterwards, ASIO refused to give Tsounis a security clearance and his application was rejected. Tsounis had been a member of the Eureka Youth League, mixed with communists at university and was a member of the CPA until 1951, ASIO said.

Tsounis complained to Labor MP, Clyde Cameron who took up the cudgels for him with vigour. He wrote to Immigration in July 1956 saying he was 'astounded' at their decision. Tsounis was 'a solvent and well respected member of the community' who as South Australian editor of a Greek newspaper was 'a supporter of the assimilation of migrants of European origin'. The Tsounis case must have struck Cameron as particularly loathsome because he then informed Immigration of 'a form of hysteria first manifested in the United States of America, and not unknown in the Italy and Germany of Mussolini and Hitler, to denounce a man of fearless independent opinion as "dangerous".' His fiery letter concluded: 'I promise you that I shall not rest until not only has the injustice of his rejection been removed, but also that on no future occasion will a similar social crime be perpetrated on an innocent individual by a Department of the Government whose only function is to render service to the public of Australia.' Clyde Cameron on the warpath was a fearsome sight, certainly enough to worry an Immigration official.

Three months later Cameron raised the Tsounis case in federal Parliament when he attacked plans to put ASIO on a statutory basis. ASIO, he said 'was prepared to hound him [Tsounis] right to the grave because in the impetuosity of youth, searching for the truth, he had, for a few brief years, embraced the Communist doctrine and had been courageous enough to come into the open and tell people that he was a Communist.'²⁶ Cameron had been told by Immigration that Tsounis had been handing out how-to-vote cards for the Communist Party in Norwood. Cameron had pointed out to Immigration that in fact no communist candidate stood for Norwood and that ASIO's information was 'absolutely false'. Apparently swayed by this, Immigration had decided to reject ASIO's advice and had granted Tsounis citizenship. ASIO had got its facts garbled but privately maintained that Tsounis had continued his 'communist activity up until 1956' and had handed out how-to-vote cards for a communist candidate in 1954.

In any event Tsounis was granted citizenship but this case was the exception that proved the rule. Mick Tsounis' brother George, for example, applied unsuccessfully in 1949, 1955 and 1968. In thousands of other cases

citizenship was denied or not even applied for by dispirited migrants. One retired ASIO officer recalled objecting to the discrimination involved in denying citizenship to communist migrants. 'My argument was that if we let people into the country, and said they were good enough to come here, and the CPA was legal and they joined it, they could still get citizenship.' His fellow officers disagreed expressing the attitude that 'you can't trust 'em, they're coms'.

In striking contrast to the intensive investigations carried out on left-wing migrants who applied for citizenship, ASIO was for the most part uninterested in migrants who had committed war crimes and had no trouble 'clearing' them for citizenship.

One such applicant for naturalisation was Lazlo Megay, a Hungarian who arrived in Australia in 1950. By 1954 he was president of the NSW Federation of Hungarian Associations and active in the Anti-Bolshevik Bloc of Nations (ABN). A report on Megay appeared prominently in a 1954 ASIO *Quarterly Report* circulated among top public servants and ministers.²⁷ Megay, it explained, was a member of the Arrowhead Cross, a pro-Nazi Hungarian movement. In spite of this early mention in the ASIO *Quarterly Report* ASIO's probing did not extend far. Megay was also the mayor of the town of Ungvar from 1941 to 1944. During this time he presided over the round-up and deportation to Auschwitz of the district's 25 000 Jews. Just prior to deportation to death, an eyewitness account reports that Megay 'bashed and kicked his innocent victims and staggered even the Nazis by his brutality . . . Megay appeared in the ghetto every day, mostly rolling drunk and in the company of other Nazis . . .' Arrested by the Americans for suspected war crimes in 1946 he was released six months later but without going through any legal procedure. A short time later both the Hungarian and the Czech Governments publicly named him as a war criminal. Megay left Europe for Australia in 1950 and presumably passed the 'security screening' test.

In 1955 he applied for Australian citizenship.²⁸ In the normal vetting process which followed, an ASIO officer found evidence of Megay's membership of the fascist Arrowhead Cross already on file. The file also stated that information had been received that he 'resorted to a type of blackmail on [the] Jewish population of his city'. But when this information was assessed the ASIO officer queried whether 'the informant is a Hungarian Jew' because the Sydney Jewish community was 'using any type of propaganda available to bring discredit to the pure Hungarian Community.' Another source (whose race or religion was not questioned) said Megay was 'violently anti-communist . . . pro-British and a fine type of man'. This ASIO accepted. Megay was cleared and received citizenship in June 1955. The following year he joined the NSW Liberal Party. An attempt by Eddie Ward to embarrass ASIO and Menzies about Megay's wartime record through parliamentary questions brought only misleading information and untruths.

Another power which ASIO exercised through Australia's immigration system was the granting or withholding of a visa on security grounds for

migrants who wished to re-enter Australia after a journey overseas. The callous exercise of this power was illustrated by the case of one Greek migrant in the mid Fifties.

In late December 1956, 29 year old Eleftherios Eleftheratos (whose name means 'liberty' in Greek and who was inevitably nicknamed 'Lefty' by his Aussie friends) received an urgent telegram from his merchant family which lived in Ethiopia. His uncle was seriously ill and his large business faced ruin unless a trusted member of the family stepped in to manage it. Lefty, who was a car production worker at the GMH factory in Pagewood, Sydney, hardly gave it a second thought. A ship which would stop at Djibuti, near Ethiopia had departed from Sydney just before he got the telegram. He found however that if he flew to Perth he could board the ship, and did so in January 1957.

Before leaving he made hurried application for a re-entry visa but left almost immediately without knowing the result.²⁸ It was a grave mistake. After attending to the business, 'Lefty' Eleftheratos turned his attention to the question of return to Australia. Then began twelve months of bureaucratic stonewalling which left him, after having lived for most of his adult life in Australia, banned from returning. In July 1957 he wrote to the Immigration Minister, Athol Townley, from Dire Dawa, Ethiopia, explaining his sudden departure. Perhaps he sensed there might be trouble because in September, not having had a response, 'Lefty' arranged for both the Greek Consul in Sydney and Labor MP Eddie Ward to lobby for the visa.

Eleftherios Eleftheratos had already had one run-in with Immigration. In March 1956 he had been denied naturalisation after an adverse report from ASIO. The reason essentially was that Eleftheratos was the secretary of the Committee for Self-Determination in Cyprus which campaigned for independence for Cyprus from the British. The local committee was regarded as a 'communist front' organisation. When Eddie Ward complained about the denial, the Minister, Harold Holt replied in a confidential letter stating that 'an objection was raised on security grounds'.

The denial of a re-entry visa was thus a re-run of earlier victimisation based on advice from Spry who reminded Immigration that he was denied naturalisation. 'Since my previous advice Eleftheratos has continued to come under security notice. Accordingly I could not grant a security clearance for him.' Heyes dutifully advised his Minister that:

I feel that we should not facilitate the return to Australia of people who would not be acceptable as immigrants on either security or character grounds, unless there are strong compassionate circumstances. In addition, I recommend that the same policy should be followed in cases where applicants for re-entry facilities have had bad character records.

Having left-wing convictions were as bad as having criminal convictions.

On 14 November 1957, the secretary of the Immigration Department, 'Tas' Heyes, wrote a five-line letter to Eleftheratos with the usual hypocritical statement that 'careful consideration' had been given to his application

but that 'the authority you are seeking has not been granted'. For good measure, Heyes secretly wrote to the British Consul in Djibuti to make sure he did not issue Eleftheratos with a visa.

Eleftherios Eleftheratos then made one last attempt to get back to Australia. In a letter to Heyes he said he was 'amazed' at the decision and had decided that some 'frank talk' was called for. He had never been a member of any subversive organisation, he said. The reason was clearly his leading role on the Cyprus issue. His committee had fought for a peaceful settlement. 'Is that a crime?' he asked.

Could those activities of mine be considered as detrimental to Australia . . . I would not even think to harm the Country which has offered me her hospitality. On the contrary I have liked Australia so much that I had decided to make her my new home and settle down for all my life. Does the fact, Sir, that I thought it was my duty to be—with regard to the Cyprus issue—a human being, make me an undesirable migrant? I always considered myself loyal to Australia and I have never ceased to admire her democratic way of life . . . Why then should I be denied the right to return to Australia?

By 1960 Eleftheratos had given up hope of ever returning to Australia. He had married in Greece and intended to migrate to join his wife's family in Canada. This time Canadian security intervened and his application for emigration was refused, almost certainly on the basis of information supplied to Canada by the Australian Security Intelligence Organization.³⁰

To Spry and the military chiefs who were making ready to fight the third world war, the activities of the peace movement were treachery pure and simple. When war broke out, they reasoned, its propaganda would demoralise the Australian side. The motivation of the communists in the peace movement, they believed, was nothing to do with the prevention of war but rather to undermine Australia's ability to fight a war.

To meet this situation, the Menzies government decided that subversives and security threats would be rounded up and placed in internment camps prior to the outbreak of war. The camps would be built and guarded by the Army under the control of the Director of Military Intelligence. ASIO's role, as 'the fourth arm of defence', was to prepare the names, addresses, physical descriptions and other clues to assist the police to arrest them as soon as possible. The collection of this data and the preparation of accompanying operational plans continued at least until the early 1970s, according to recent documents.¹⁷

Spry began his preparations for internment eleven days after he began

work on 17 July 1950. On the 28th he issued an order to all his regional chiefs, commanding them in total secrecy to prepare several lists of people, some of whom would be interned, others who would have their movements restricted and still others who would be subject to military censorship of their letters.¹⁸

One list of internees consisted of the core of CPA members. ASIO officers were charged with collecting a special file on: CPA national and local leaders; CPA organisers and journalists; 'leading communist trade union officials' (later widened to include all state union officials and organisers); and CPA members who were public servants, scientists, or employed by firms with defence contracts. Another list was prepared of Australian and British citizens who were not CPA members but who were defined as 'security risks' and therefore would be prevented from leaving Australia and subject to military censorship.

The other major category of people to be interned were 'enemy aliens', defined as migrants who had left their home country after 1 January 1946 and whose passports had been issued or renewed after 1 January 1948. Enemy countries were the USSR, including Latvia, Estonia and Lithuania, Eastern European countries, Yugoslavia, China, North Korea and the 'Vietminh area' of French Indochina. In these cases the plan was to immediately intern the officials of migrant clubs which supported the policy of enemy countries or were 'otherwise under communist influence'. Likewise all journalists on newspapers associated with them. On top of this all aliens with adverse security records would be interned. 'Aliens' who had 'specialist knowledge of value to an enemy' would be stopped from leaving Australia in the weeks before an actual declaration of war.

In constructing the lists of potential camp inmates ASIO had to divide them according to local police districts to assist efficient raids on the outbreak of war. It also had to inform the Director of Military Intelligence of the number of spouses and children of security risks in order to prepare appropriate camp facilities.

The task Spry set his officers was urgent and, it soon became apparent, gigantic, since it meant listing huge numbers of refugees and migrants from countries which had become communist. In December 1950 Spry slightly reduced the sweep of migrant internment but broadened the category of those on the Left to be immediately interned to include 'officials of ACP Party branches and Communist disrupters in industry'. He set the date for completion of this new task as 15 January 1951 adding, 'it must be clearly understood that should an emergency arise before that date the lists will be required immediately'.

Another decision on 'Aliens (Non Enemy)' ordered that 'all those with an adverse pro-communist security record should be listed automatically . . . ' but that 'it is not intended at this stage to intern former Nazis and Fascists'. Of the Russians living in Australia, he ordered that all were to be listed automatically 'exclusive of White Russians who are anti-communist'.¹⁹ In January 1951 the Director of Military Intelligence at Victoria Barracks asked

Spry for the number of internees in order to get some idea of the number of camps needed. After some delay Spry told him that a total of 7000 would have to be accommodated. Of these, 950 were British subjects (including 50 from New Guinea) although this figure, he warned, did not 'include children who, because of their dependent status, may have to accompany an interned parent or parents', Spry reassured the DMI that the number of children 'would not exceed 100 initially' and that after war had broken out a further 700 adults and 50 to 100 children would need to be interned. The rest of the 7000 arose because of Spry's decree that 'aliens' who held a passport of a potential enemy country would be interned.

By early 1951 it was clear that Spry faced major problems in his plans for internment. It was likely that after the initial round-up, many internees, especially native-born Australian leftists, would appeal against their detention. The problem was to collect hard evidence that would satisfy a tribunal that a detainee was a member of the CPA. This was easy if they had stood for election or had admitted their membership in *Tribune* or if their name had been found on documents scooped up by the various raids on the CPA since 1949. But it did not cover many people whom ASIO 'knew' from its agents were CPA members. The task of satisfying a future appeals tribunal soon grew into a problem of huge proportions particularly after a meeting between Spry, the Solicitor-General, Professor Bailey and the Attorney-General, Senator Spicer, in September 1951.²⁰

Spicer said he was concerned that a 'blanket approach' as laid out in Spry's categories might result in people being wrongfully interned or others escaping internment. He was also worried by the definition of communist 'associates' which he thought was 'terribly vague'. On the vexed question of 'aliens' from enemy countries, Spicer posed the obvious question: 'what of the man who retains a love of his country and does not wish to be naturalised but who is unsympathetic to communism?' Spry: 'That worries us too.'

Spicer therefore made a decision that would consume huge amounts of ASIO time. The Organization would have to open a file and collect evidence on each potential internee rather than simply presenting him with a list of names for him to sign. It proved to be a giant logistical task. On each subversive a legal 'brief for internment' had to be prepared with a series of exhibits which could be presented to court to prove that a person was indeed worthy of internment. Each year the brief had to be checked for changes of address and marital status etc. and updated with new evidence of CPA membership. As well as this, practical information such as a current photograph had to be included to help police identify the target for arrest.

The burden of overseeing the legal briefs for internment fell on ASIO's Deputy Director General (Administration and Legal) Bernard Tuck. Recruited by Judge Reed in 1949, Tuck was an Adelaide lawyer who had represented internees during the Second World War and who understood the appeals system as it then operated. Appointed in April 1949 as the Officer-in-Charge, ACT, in late 1950 Tuck was transferred by Spry to Headquarters to oversee

ASIO's legal work, especially its duties in regard to internment. Spicer's insistence that each alien and communist internee was to be treated as a separate case was to cause endless frustration for Tuck. The size of the task and the need for watertight evidence almost overwhelmed him and his small administrative and legal section several times in the first ten years. On one occasion Tuck tried to narrow Spry's categories for internment but without luck. On another, an exasperated legal officer noted in 1957 that each time exhibits were updated it meant that a 'conservative estimate' of 104 000 pages were discarded, largely due to ASIO's practice of keeping sixteen copies of each internment brief.²¹

In the early 1950s, the number of British subjects to be interned hovered around 1000, of whom 128 were 'leading communist union officials' and 25 were believed to be engaged in espionage. On top of this, plans were made for Australia to accommodate internees from British colonies and areas of influence in India, Hong Kong, Malaya, Singapore and elsewhere in the Far East. But the problem of dealing with enemy aliens continued to grow. By June 1954, 182 658 had arrived in Australia since the war's end—clearly an impossible number to check on. On top of this most of them were anti-communists, rather than security risks in a possible war. In a submission to the Government in April 1955, Spry proposed an amendment. He honed the aliens list down to two categories. Category 1 would comprise 4092 aliens who had been granted a passport after their country had turned communist and Category 2 would comprise 573 people who had adverse security records since arriving in Australia. Of the 4092 not a single one had an adverse security record. Nevertheless he proposed that police first arrest them on the outbreak of war and that while the Army detained them, Military Intelligence would interrogate them to determine their future.

The situation became even more absurd when hundreds of refugees fleeing from Soviet repression of the Hungarian revolution of 1956 began to stream into Australia. Technically they were all 'enemy aliens' but all had passed ASIO screening in Europe including some who admitted to having been former members of the Hungarian Communist Party.²²

The situation bore a strong resemblance to the arbitrary and wholesale detention of Italians and Germans in 1939, which indiscriminately scooped up the anti-fascist elements of those communities. A picture of how the whole system would work is contained in a 1955 memo by Spry to the Government. His nightmarish vision of Australia when the Cold War became a shooting war went as follows:

I imagine that there will be established in addition to internment camps designed to provide for lengthy detention, smaller 'holding' camps near to capital cities, to which in the first instance, the persons listed in Category 1 may be brought for interrogation so that the nature of their true allegiance may be determined. I imagine that some will then appear to be persons whose detention ought to be continued and that they will be sent to other camps for the purpose; that some will prove to be persons best disposed of by allotting them to a 'Civil Alien Corps'; that some will prove to be persons whose activities

ought to be restricted; that some will prove to be persons best dealt with by 'manpower' authorities; and that others may prove fit to be otherwise released.²³

Spry's memo also urges that the whole plan be kept a secret, even from the Cabinet. This arose when Spry again met Spicer and Bailey and argued strongly that he should be allowed to give the internment lists to state Police Commissioners. Unless this was done, he warned, there could be 'confusion when the time for action arrives'. Spicer agreed but suggested he raise the matter with Menzies. Both he and Spry agreed that the issue of the police having lists of Australian citizens and migrants to be interned was so delicate that 'it would be wiser for it to be dealt with by a smaller committee comprising the Prime Minister, the Minister for Defence, the Minister for Immigration and the Attorney-General' rather than by the full Cabinet.

The year 1955 also marked the highpoint of plans for mass internment. In November Spry told the Director of Military Intelligence that on the outbreak of war he should provide internment camps for the following:

BRITISH SUBJECTS		ALIENS		
Men	Women & children	Men	Women & children	Single women
1040	2350	2830	4568	367

The memo helpfully noted that of a grand total of over 11 000 men, women and children to be interned, 260 would be 'Asiatics'.²⁴ This figure was far higher than the number of planned internments for the whole of the United Kingdom at the same time.²⁵

For much of the latter 1950s every request by Military Intelligence for updated and accurate figures on the number of internees set off a mini crisis in ASIO. Fearful little bureaucratic wrangles developed over methods of counting and categorising the women and children involved who had to be found separate accommodation to the men. Careful checks had to be made as to whether a married woman was also to be interned for her association with her husband or whether she qualified in her own right. As well there were women who qualified as security risks but whose husbands did not. Figures were sought from the Bureau of Statistics on how many children were in an average family. On top of this, in 1956 Tuck's Legal Branch became aware of the Geneva Convention that stipulated that dependants of internees could not be legally interned for that reason alone and had to be financially supported by the Government. Confusion then reigned when Military Intelligence was told this and ultimately the question was left to a future Attorney-General at the time of the outbreak of war. In the meantime ASIO continued to collect lists of children for internment.

In 1960 Military Intelligence asked ASIO for up-to-date details of internment numbers in the event of 'a limited war where the enemy is the Democratic Republic of Vietnam or the Chinese Peoples Republic'. A check by ASIO showed that the number of internees had dropped from 11 000 to around 1400 composed of 617 adult British subjects, 72 children and (after

delay during which the Legal Branch frankly admitted that it did not have 'sufficient data to assist in estimates of the number of aliens') ASIO finally advised that 426 adult aliens and 190 children would be interned as well as 131 'Asiatics' and their children. Given that a 'limited war' with Vietnam broke out five years later, it is interesting to speculate on the content of the as yet unreleased letters between ASIO and Military Intelligence at that time.²⁶

As the years rolled by the idea of a survivable atomic war became more and more absurd, as did the notion of mass internment. ASIO's compilation of lists of subversives and aliens with attached legal briefs and exhibits continued to be updated until at least the early 1970s. Throughout the whole period the plans for internment dictated much of the work of Section c (Aliens) and Section b (CPA) of B1 Branch.

The only time when the issue surfaced publicly occurred in November 1956 when Eddie Ward MP told Parliament that 'the Security Service has recently prepared a list of "likely internees", including some trade union officials in the event of an emergency'. By this time Ward, an outspoken MP from working class east Sydney and former Labor minister, had become the nemesis of Menzies and Spry, particularly after the Petrov Affair. His fantastic tale was met with disbelief and derision.²⁷ Ward privately boasted of his contacts in security and personally knew several SIS officers and perhaps this is how he stumbled on the tip of such a very big iceberg. The remark, thrown into debate during a clash on phone tapping and the 1956 ASIO Act, was never followed up. Leading members of the CPA strongly suspected that such arrangements were being prepared but wildly underestimated the scale. The CPA journalist Rupert Lockwood relates how he was told by Dr Evatt that thirteen prominent communists would be interned on a camp on Flinders Island in Bass Strait. In reality internment camps were to be scattered across Australia, based on each military command.

The internment plans reveal a recurring problem for ASIO. While it was easy to compile 'intelligence' on individuals for its own purposes, ASIO immediately struck problems when it had to prepare its 'intelligence' for assessment and scrutiny by an outsider such as a judge. This problem recurred in the Petrov Royal Commission and years later in the Combe-Ivanov Royal Commission when crucial assumptions failed when tested in the normal legal way. A similar systemic problem arose whenever Government or Labor MPs proposed an appeals tribunal for public servants denied a security clearance. Vetting depended crucially on judgments made about motivation and loyalty, based on alleged political activities. While Spry always warned that many ASIO sources could not be used in evidence at such a tribunal, one suspects that another reason was simply that when scrutinised independently, ASIO's vetting decisions would be overturned.

Ultimately the problem was that in law, it was not a crime to be a communist nor to espouse 'subversive' ideas. ASIO just acted as if it was.

"The first line of defence in war planning was the political *cordon sanitaire* thrown around Australia by ASIO officers operating under the cover of the Department of Immigration.

The second line of defence in war planning regards migrants was the planned internment of 'enemy aliens' and subversive migrants at the outbreak of war."