

Big Brother is coming - public beware

by Sarah Lang

The Counter-Terrorism Bill on its way to Parliament gives police too much power, treats offenders as "terrorists" too early and may put protesters in jail, its opponents say.

The bill, which a select committee passed to a second reading last month, brings New Zealand into line with recent UN conventions on the misuse of nuclear materials and plastic explosives.

It extends the 2002 Terrorism Suppression Act that met New Zealand's obligations to international conventions that combat terrorist bombings and the financing of terrorism.

The bill gives Government agencies greater investigative powers to respond to terrorist threats, says the select committee report.

The powers apply to any offences that may be committed by a terrorist.

Kevin Locke, Green MP and spokesperson for defence, sat on the select committee and made his concerns clear.

"We shouldn't give the police the extra powers contained in the bill, or expand the Crimes Act to enable advocates of non-violent protest to be jailed," said Mr Locke, also the Green human rights spokesperson.

He says the new police search, tracking and interception powers are too wide.

"Police will now have the power, under warrant, to put tracking devices on people."

Mr Locke says police will also get the power to demand pin numbers, passwords and other personal information during searches.

Those who refuse will face three

months jail or a \$2000 fine.

The report says police powers must be wide at the investigation stage as it is not possible to know early on whether it is terrorism.

Three provisions amend the Crimes Act, Summary Proceedings Act and Misuse of Drugs Act.

Mr Locke says the bill is "smuggling in" amendments with no particular reference to terrorism.

Victoria University Pro-Vice Chancellor and Dean of Law, Professor Matthew Palmer, who made a submission to the committee, says there is no reason to have separate "terrorist" and "non-terrorist" regimes.

"Terrorist acts are no different from crimes such as murder and bombing apart from their motives.

"The difference is simply a perception."

Offenders committing the same act should be treated the same, Professor Palmer says.

"The safeguards that our society considers are justified in fighting crime are just as relevant in fighting terrorism."

Mr Locke says the original act's definition of terrorism is too broad and needs to be changed so protesters and activists are not at risk.

"The process of designating who is a terrorist is still too politicised and secretive," he says.

Mr Locke says that seven years jail for anyone threatening action causing major economic loss could mean trouble for strikers and anti-GE protesters.

The legislation says a strike or a protest is not a crime "by itself".

Mr Locke also says the unintentional endangering of human life

could come under the bill.

The select committee noted his "minority view" and his other concerns that the bill might affect legitimate protesters.

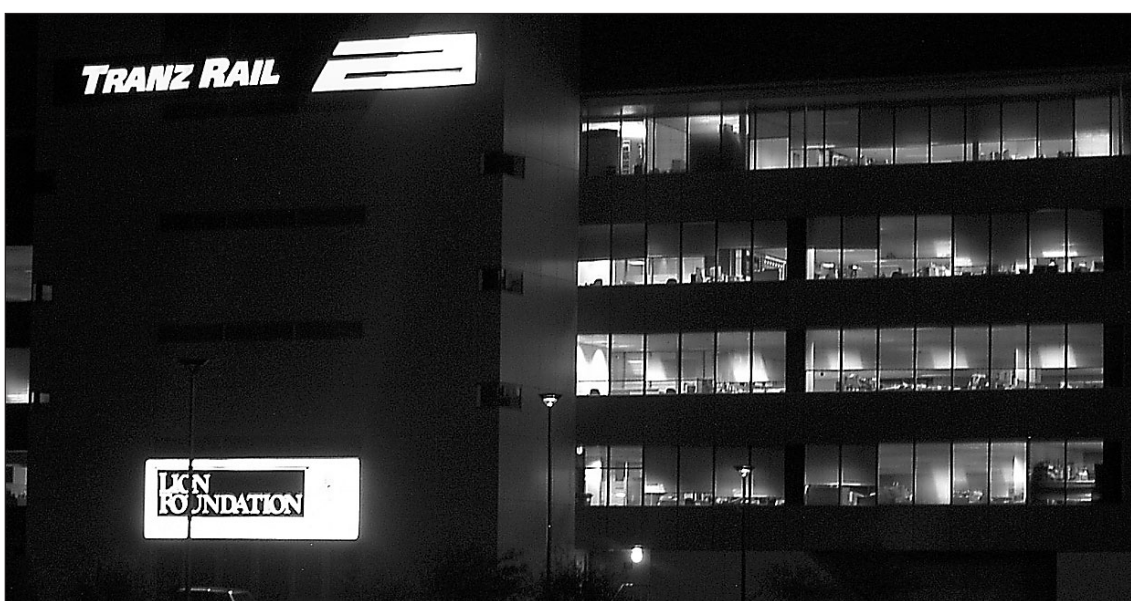
A wide range of groups and individuals made submissions, including legal experts and civil liberties groups.

The report says there must be proof of terrorist intent far over and above protest action.

The committee got advice from the Attorney-General to make sure the bill complies with the Bill of Rights Act 1990 to protect rights such as free speech and the freedom of association.

Professor Palmer says terrorist attacks in the last few years have had a deep impact on New Zealand laws.

He says New Zealand has an obligation to adhere to 12 international terrorism conventions.



GLOW IN THE DARK: The Green Party's website is blowing the whistle on power-squanderers.

Green Party urges North Shore businesses to save electricity

by Sebastian van der Zwan

The North Shore City Council, a Takapuna office building and a Glenfield business were nominated on the Green Party's website as top electricity wasters.

Nominated by members of the public, the nominees were in the running for the Cold Shower Award, a prize for the biggest power squanderer.

The council has been nominated for keeping a street lamp on for 24 hours a day for the last five years on Ravenwood Drive in Forrest Hill.

The Tranz Rail offices in Smales Farm Office Park were nominated for being lit up at night.

"Almost every light is on about 9pm and there never appears to be anyone working in the building at this time," writes the anonymous nominator.

Freedom Furniture in Glenfield has also been nominated for running

up to three desk lamps on every desk on display in the store.

Siri Rangamuwa, asset manager of transport at the city council, says they were aware of the street lamp problem in Forrest Hill.

He says the problem was caused by a line fault, which contractor United Networks was responsible for, and it has now been fixed.

Philip Evans, energy management team leader, says the council is taking many measures to save power.

He says it is trialling compact, energy-efficient street lamps. It has also reduced the operating hours of street lighting and has started a switch-off campaign in its offices.

Mr Evans says they have been conducting switch-off audits and "the results have been fantastic".

Sue Foley, general manager for corporate affairs at Tranz Rail, says she thinks its nomination is "very odd" as the company is highly conscious of saving power.

"We have put a message out to all

staff to turn off anything they are not using."

Ms Foley says there must have been people working at the time the lights were on. This is because the lights are programmed to be lit only when there are people working in the building.

Jane Scott, communications manager at Freedom Furniture, is also surprised at the nomination of one of its stores.

She says stores have been directed to cut back on lighting.

They have had their air conditioning adjusted to save power.

According to its website, the Green Party has sent letters to the Cold Shower Award nominees requesting that they use less electricity.

The Green Party gave out a Bright Spark Award for power savers as part of its Big Turn Off campaign.

Companies and organisations nominated for this award received a letter of congratulations and went in the draw for a trophy.

Hey, politicians! Have you heard the Word?

by Jared Savage

A new political party, Word, has been started by an AUT student and has already attracted 150 financial members.

Grant Findlay, a 20-year-old Bachelor of Communication Studies student majoring in television, aims to sign up the required 500 financial members by 2004.

This is the minimum number of members to receive official recogni-

tion from the Electoral Commission.

The idea of starting a political party occurred to Mr Findlay while discussing the problems of full-time study with his family.

He said the apathy of fellow students can be frustrating.

"Sometimes it's depressing because I thought other students would support a student party. A lot of people don't care or think that I'm taking the piss."

"We take this seriously and hope

that the student body, and eventually New Zealand's population, will take us seriously too."

One of the major policies of the Word Party is to expand the thresholds of the current student allowance so that more of those who are studying are eligible to receive it.

"The majority of students get a raw deal from the government. Word is a student-run and student-orientated party. We're here to make a difference, to give us a voice."

Customs gets more power to detain suspicious arrivals

by Miriam Bell

Expanding the powers of customs officers by way of a bill currently before the Government administration select committee could prove dangerous, warns a veteran MP.

The Border Security Bill is part of the Government's approach towards protecting the country from terrorism and strengthening trade security.

An important component of the bill gives customs officers the power to detain and question people for up to 12 hours.

Green Party foreign affairs spokesperson Keith Locke says he is worried that New Zealand is moving towards a system that grants too much power to customs.

"We do not want customs officers to become too much like the police who are specially trained and who operate under specific controls," he says.

"You have to be careful when you grant extra powers and make someone a jack of all trades. It could be a very dangerous situation."

Mr Locke says customs officers are not trained to be political interviewers or to assess the complex situations and information that they may have to.

An example would be cases involving asylum seekers like Ahmed Zaoui, the Algerian who has been granted refugee status but is detained in Paremoro prison for security reasons.

However, Raj Thomson, the spokesperson for Customs Minister Rick Barker, says the range of enhanced provisions for customs will better protect New Zealanders from terrorism.

Technology such as the new advance passenger screening system, a database used to determine whether people are eligible to travel, will enable customs officials around the world to share information and trigger alerts.

"It's quite important because the issue subsequent to September 11 has been about making us more wary of the need to ensure checks and balances, without hindering the flow of traffic," says Mr Thomson.

He says asylum seekers would only run into problems if there were legitimate and substantiated concerns about the sharing of information with customs counterparts in other countries.

"The expectation is that the bill will be quite good for the country," he says.

New Zealand Customs spokesperson Bob Taylor agrees. He says the bill will help officers faced with people attempting to make a covert or

unlawful entry into the country.

"Some people arrive in suspicious circumstances and you want to ask some questions about them, like 'who are you', 'what's your identity', 'where do you live', 'what are you doing in New Zealand?'"

Mr Taylor says if the bill is passed, customs will have the ability to find out more about such people and determine if they are a risk to the country.

"If terrorists arrive in the country we will be able to detain and question them."

He says customs is the front-line of protection for the country.

"I don't think the New Zealand public would want to think customs weren't doing the best they could to protect them."

The bill is moving through Parliament as one of three pieces of legislation introduced in response to September 11. It sits alongside the Counter-Terrorism Bill and the Maritime Security Bill.

However, Mr Locke says this legislation means New Zealand is moving in the direction of the United States, which now has a Department of Homeland Security and uses civilians as law enforcers.

"The bill is driven by the US reaction to a supposed terrorist threat. There is an exaggerated threat behind it."

He urges caution because the last terrorists to get to New Zealand were connected to the French Government and would probably not have been caught by the planned border security enhancements.

The bill also broadens the focus and scope of customs in the area of goods and trade.

Mr Locke says the Greens are in favour of the bill's awareness and provision for biosecurity issues.

"The real money should go into biosecurity, not the one in a million chance of a terrorist arrival in New Zealand."

In the 2003 budget, customs received significant new funding to strengthen and protect trade and border security.

Information from Mr Barker's office shows funding will be spent on the employment of about 150 new staff, which will increase the number of customs staff by about 20%.

A further \$8.9 million will fund an increase in operating expenditure for trade security while between \$15 million and \$25 million will be invested in x-ray technology.

The Government select committee received 20 submissions on the bill.

It has completed hearings in Wellington and is considering what it has heard.