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# Review of Eveline Lubbers, *Secret Manoeuvres in the Dark*

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## Review of Eveline Lubbers, Secret Manoeuvres in the Dark

### **Abstract**

In the 1980s, the small anarchist group London Greenpeace - not related to Greenpeace International - produced a leaflet, "What's wrong with McDonald's?," about the poor nutritional value of McDonald's food, low wages of workers and environmental impacts of beef production, among other issues. McDonald's top management, being highly sensitive to criticism, hired two separate security firms to collect information on the group. Each of the firms hired individuals to infiltrate the activist group - which wasn't hard.

Because London Greenpeace had only a few members, the new recruits - the infiltrators - were welcomed; they provided energy for campaigning on various issues. At some meetings, there were several infiltrators attending, a good proportion of the attendance. The infiltrators produced reports for McDonald's, including detailed comments about each person involved. Because the two security firms didn't know about each other's operation, they reported on each other's infiltrators.

### **Keywords**

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# Secret manoeuvres in the dark

by **Eveline Lubbers**

A book review published in [\*The Whistle\*](#) (Newsletter of Whistleblowers Australia), [No. 74, April 2013](#), pp. 8-9

**Reviewer: Brian Martin**

In the 1980s, the small anarchist group London Greenpeace - not related to Greenpeace International - produced a leaflet, "What's wrong with McDonald's?," about the poor nutritional value of McDonald's food, low wages of workers and environmental impacts of beef production, among other issues. McDonald's top management, being highly sensitive to criticism, hired two separate security firms to collect information on the group. Each of the firms hired individuals to infiltrate the activist group - which wasn't hard.

Because London Greenpeace had only a few members, the new recruits - the infiltrators - were welcomed; they provided energy for campaigning on various issues. At some meetings, there were several infiltrators attending, a good proportion of the attendance. The infiltrators produced reports for McDonald's, including detailed comments about each person involved. Because the two security firms didn't know about each other's operation, they reported on each other's infiltrators.

With the information acquired from this surveillance operation, McDonald's management sued five members of London Greenpeace for defamation over the group's leaflet. Three of them caved in to this intimidation, but two - Helen Steel and Dave Morris - defended themselves in court, and the rest is history. It was the longest court case in British history. Although McDonald's won legally, it was a massive public relations disaster for the company.

One of the side aspects of the case was that McDonald's was forced to produce its files about the surveillance operation, including reports from the various infiltrators into London Greenpeace. These documents provide exceptional insight into how

corporate spying operates.

Eveline Lubbers is an activist researcher who specialises in investigating corporate and police spying on activists. Her latest and most important work is the book *Secret Manoeuvres in the Dark*. In it, she recounts the McDonald's case in detail, providing great insight into corporate spying and its links with police spying.

This is just one of several extended case studies in the book. Together, they reveal an enormous amount about spying on activists.

In the 1970s and 1980s, the company Nestlé was subject to a major consumer boycott over its sales of powdered milk for infants in poor countries. Initially, top management and its public relations firms used a strategy of ignoring the boycott, but under new leadership a different approach was tried. A private consultant, Rafael Pagan, was hired and given ample funding.

Pagan initiated a strategy of dividing the opposition. He made overtures to some of the church groups involved in the campaign, and eventually succeeded in splitting them from the boycott through promises of improved corporate behaviour. As well, Pagan helped set up an ostensibly independent organisation, Nestlé Infant Formula Audit Commission, that seemed like it provided the regulation necessary.

Lubbers notes that corporate spying is done to find out what's going on, and to prepare corporate counter-strategies. Corporate strategy and corporate surveillance of activists go hand in hand. Pagan went on to set up his own company that, among other projects, worked to undermine support for the boycott targeting apartheid in South Africa.

Lubbers notes that "Pagan had a military career before he became a company strategist." She gives many examples of links between private investigators and the police, military and intelligence communities, including common backgrounds, personal connections and mobility between jobs in these sectors. Private investigators often use their links with police to obtain confidential information. Those with police, military and intelligence backgrounds and connections often see activists as the enemy rather than as citizens

exercising their basic rights.

Corporate and police spying can be incredibly damaging to activists. It produces inside information that can be used to thwart activist efforts. Infiltrators sometimes try to influence campaign directions and encourage use of aggressive and violent tactics that would discredit activists.

Even more damaging, in many cases, is the impact on group morale. Exposure of infiltrators strikes at the trust essential for activists to work together. Some infiltrators have held paid jobs in their target organisations and were seen as experienced and effective campaigners. In some cases, other activists refused to believe the allegations against infiltrators, despite damning evidence. Usually, groups did not want publicity about infiltration, which has meant that there is relatively little public information about these sorts of operations. This is another reason by Lubbers' book is so important.

Whistleblowers need to be aware about the possibilities of surveillance and infiltration. Some whistleblowers come under surveillance themselves. Allan Kessing, accused of leaking the Customs Department report he co-authored about airport security, has told about the extraordinary government expense used to hire people to watch and follow him (see the [January issue of \*The Whistle\*](#)). Others are subject to surveillance but never know about it at the time.

Activists are prime targets. When the NSW Police released its files on political spying, many activists discovered there had been infiltrators in their groups, reporting all sorts of personal details to the police.

For anyone concerned about justice and fair play, the possibility of spying needs to be taken into account. For example, if in the course of your work you obtain evidence of environmental vandalism, one possibility is to leak documents to an environmental group. But what if the group has been infiltrated? Or what if spies have obtained access to the group's computer files through remote access? Your anonymity and your disclosure may be compromised.

The best antidote to spying is disclosure. In this, Lubbers' impressive work is vital in two ways: it is a

potent disclosure itself and it shows how to go about exposing spying on activists. She advocates "activist research"; hopefully some researchers will follow her example.

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Eveline Lubbers, *Secret Manoeuvres in the Dark: Corporate and Police Spying on Activists* (London: Pluto Press, 2012)

I thank Sharon Callaghan and Majken Sørensen for valuable comments on a draft of this review.

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