SPYING ON POLITICIANS

“To me, there are only two issues at stake here: right or wrong. And the longer I worked on the clandestine surveillance projects, the more I could see that they were not only illegal, but also unconstitutional.”

Margaret Newsham is not pleased with herself for participating in spying on ordinary people, politicians, interest groups and private companies, which is exactly what she did for 10 years, from 1974 to 1984. Both the satellites and the computer programs were developed at Lockheed’s headquarters in Sunnyvale California, and in 1977, she was stationed at the largest listening post in the world at Menwith Hill, England. “On the day at Menwith Hill when I realized in earnest how utterly wrong it was, I was sitting with one of the many “translators”. He was an expert in languages like Russian, Chinese and Japanese. Suddenly he asked me if I wanted to listen in on a conversation taking place in the US at an office in the US Senate Building. Then I clearly heard a southern American dialect I thought I had heard before.”

“Who is that?” I asked the translator who told me that it was Republican senator Strom Thurmond. ‘Oh my gosh!’ I thought. We’re not only spying on other countries, but also on our own citizens. That’s when I realized in earnest that what we were doing had nothing to do with national security interests of the US.”

**KNOWLEDGE IS POWER**

In all its complicated simplicity, the American intelligence agency, NSA, together with intelligence agencies in England, Canada, Australia and New Zealand, has established a system of satellites and computer systems that can monitor by and large all electronic communication in the world: phone conversations, e-mails, telexes and telefaxes. A number of other countries are affiliated as third or fourth party participants, including Denmark.

The fundamental concept of the system is to get access to all important political movements in hostile and allied countries alike and to keep an eye on all important economic movements. Knowledge is power, and the NSA knows it. Furthermore, NSA’s spies function as the only primary authority to supervise who receives what information and what it is used for.

“Even then, Echelon was very big and sophisticated. As early as 1979 we could track a specific person and zoom in on his phone conversation while he was communicating. Since our satellites could in 1984 film a postage stamp lying on the ground, it is almost impossible to imagine how all-encompassing the system must be today.”

**ECHELON WAS NSA'S IDEA**

Who came up with the name Echelon?

“The NSA. Lockheed Martin’s alphanumeric code was P415.”

What did you actually do?

“Unfortunately, I can’t tell you all my duties. I am still bound by professional secrecy, and I would hate to go to prison or get involved in any trouble, if you know what I mean. In general, I can tell you that I was responsible for compiling the various systems and programs, configuring the whole thing and making it operational on main frames [large computers, ed.].”

Which part of the system is named Echelon?

“The computer network itself. The software programs are known as SILKWORTH and SIRE, and one of the most important surveillance satellites is named VORTEX. It intercepts things like phone conversations.”

**APPROVED BY THE CIA**

You worked as an agent for the NSA, but were employed by a private company?

“Yes, it is almost impossible to tell the difference between NSA agents and civilians employed by Lockheed Martin, Ford and IBM. The borderlines are very vague. I had one of the highest security classifications which required the approval of the CIA, the NSA, the Navy and the Air Force. The approval included both a lie detector test, and an expanded personal history test in which my family and acquaintances were discretely checked by the security agency.”

The sky darkens over the cascading neon lights of Las Vegas when Margaret Newsham tells of countless infringements of security regulations and about her colleague who suffered brain damage when she patriated in the development of the Stealth bomber. Though Margaret Newsham is totally exhausted, she also seems relieved.

“This is the first time I have ever told anyone some of the things I told you today. But now I want to get Mr. Gunther soon so I feel safe again. She measures her blood pressure and looks very alarmed.

“I had better go to the doctor tomorrow morning, so maybe we should meet later on in the day.” When she returns with Mr. Gunther an hour later, the dog inspects every room before Margaret goes in. The last thing she does before falling asleep on her king size bed is to check her pistol to make sure it is still loaded.

**Facts:**

Lockheed Martin is the largest supplier of munitions to the US military services and to their intelligence agencies, the NSA and the CIA. During the eighties, Lockheed Martin took over LORAL Space Systems and Ford Aerospace which also deliver monitoring equipment to the espionage agencies. Margaret Newsham worked for the NSA through her employment at Ford and Lockheed from 1974 to 1984. In 1977 and 1978, Newsham was stationed at the largest listening post in the world at Menwith Hill, England.

She received on-the-job training at NSA headquarters at Fort George Meade in Maryland, USA. Ekstra Bladet has Margaret Newsham’s stationing orders from the US Department of Defense. She possessed the high security classification: TOP SECRET CRYPTO.

According to information found by Ekstra Bladet in the Pentagon’s databases, the NSA had 38,613 employees in 1995. This figure does not include the many employees at private companies who work for the NSA.

Ekstra Bladet has documented the existence of Echelon in a long series of articles over the last months.

Denmark is affiliated with the Echelon network as a third party, and the most important Danish listening post is located at Aflandshage on the island of Amager.