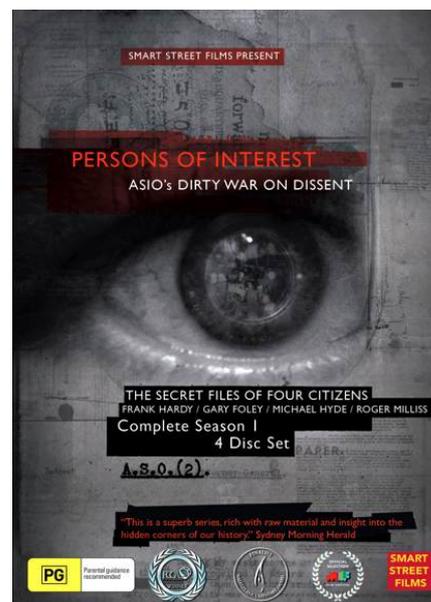


# ***Persons of Interest: ASIO's dirty war on dissent: Documentary Series Review***

*Persons of Interest* is a four part documentary series exploring the lives of a cross section of Australia's radicals through delving into their previously classified ASIO documents. It portrays their changing political perspectives in a roving discussion of their' life and times, through interviews and with reference to the archived material in the reports, photos and footage from their files.

The documentary traverses decades of Australian' political life in examining their changing fortunes, from the post war period, through MCarthyism, the campaign against Australia's involvement in Vietnam, right up to the dissolution of the Soviet Union. It is a meticulously researched and well crafted documentary series, it is a gives great insight into these tumultuous periods.



The first disk shows the story of Roger Milliss and his father Bruce, both Communist Party members. Next shown is Michael Hyde, part of the student protests against Australia's involvement in the Vietnam war. The third disk is centred on Gary Foley, a black nationalist modelled after the Black Panther movement. The final story is that of Frank Hardy, Australian novelist and Communist.

Within this short documentary series is the entire gamut of the characters involved, from the people formerly under investigation themselves, their family, acquaintances, the

informants that spied on them, and even former ASIO intelligence agents are interviewed. Along with historians and other academics who give insightful and worthy commentary.

The film is hostile to the intrusion of ASIO into the personal life of the various political opponents of the government of the day. In an obvious reference to the leaks of Snowden, it contrasts the crude surveillance of an earlier era, against "the recent leaks that exposed spying and surveillance on a massive scale". This alongside the continual year on year increases in the powers, budget, staff numbers of Australia's intelligence agencies, with the implementation of various anti terror laws, the narrator grimly states that: "it paints a bright future" for them. Since the documentary's release the process has continue uninterrupted, most recently with the passing of the foreign interference bill.

Since making *Persons Of Interest* for in 2014, Smart Street Films have struggled to secure funding for a second season, largely due to the perennial budget cuts to Australian Broadcasting Corporation and the semi-privatisation of SBS, both a component of the ongoing austerity and the slashing of social spending. The first four documentaries were envisaged as only the first series in a running project, there are lots of stories to be told from reading though the archives. After the filmmakers lobbying and petitioning the two state broadcasters, it was only recently that we saw the announcement that they have secured a new contract to produced a program of short 12 minute documentaries on major news stories from the last 40 years for ABC Iview to be called Retro-Report.

The trend towards ever increasing funds for the Intelligence agencies alongside the decimation of funding for arts and culture shows no sign of abating, in the 2018-19 budget, the Turnbull cabinet announced:

"To deal with anticipated social and political disaffection,

the Australian Security Intelligence Organisation (ASIO), will receive a \$24.4 million boost this year, up from \$518.6 million, adding 121 full-time jobs to its staff of about 1,800.” (1)

And in the next breath:

“Australian Broadcasting Corporation news services and jobs will be further gutted by freezing its funding until 2021–22, slicing another \$83.7 million over three years, on top of \$254 million in cuts imposed since 2014.” (1)

Nearly limitless funds for the intelligence agencies while funding for access to high quality arts and culture through the public broadcaster is slashed!

Despite the egregious state of affairs, *Persons of Interest* is a great concept, it is a fascinating documentary. It acts as a damning exposure on the pernicious influence excersized by the intelligence agencies over the lives of ordinary Australians. I would even go so far to say that it is exciting to see this reasoned, probative look into Australian history produced. To that end it deserves a wider audience.

Persons of Interest: ASIO's dirty war on dissent

4 x 52 minute films

Smart Street Films

2014

Director: Hayden Keenan

[www.smartstreetfilms.com.au](http://www.smartstreetfilms.com.au)

Reference

1. Mike Head, Desperate and vicious pre-election budget in Australia

[www.wsws.org/en/articles/2018/05/09/budg-m09.html](http://www.wsws.org/en/articles/2018/05/09/budg-m09.html)