

Self-confessed 'old Leftie' Murray Horton has spent 40 years fighting the system. He talks to MARTIN van BEYENEN.

The last radical

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He owns his own well-maintained, mortgage-free home (once painted for \$500 by peace campaigner Owen Wilkes), is married to Becky, whom he met at a conference in the Philippines, has a real job, and his never-luxuriant long hair and beard have gone.

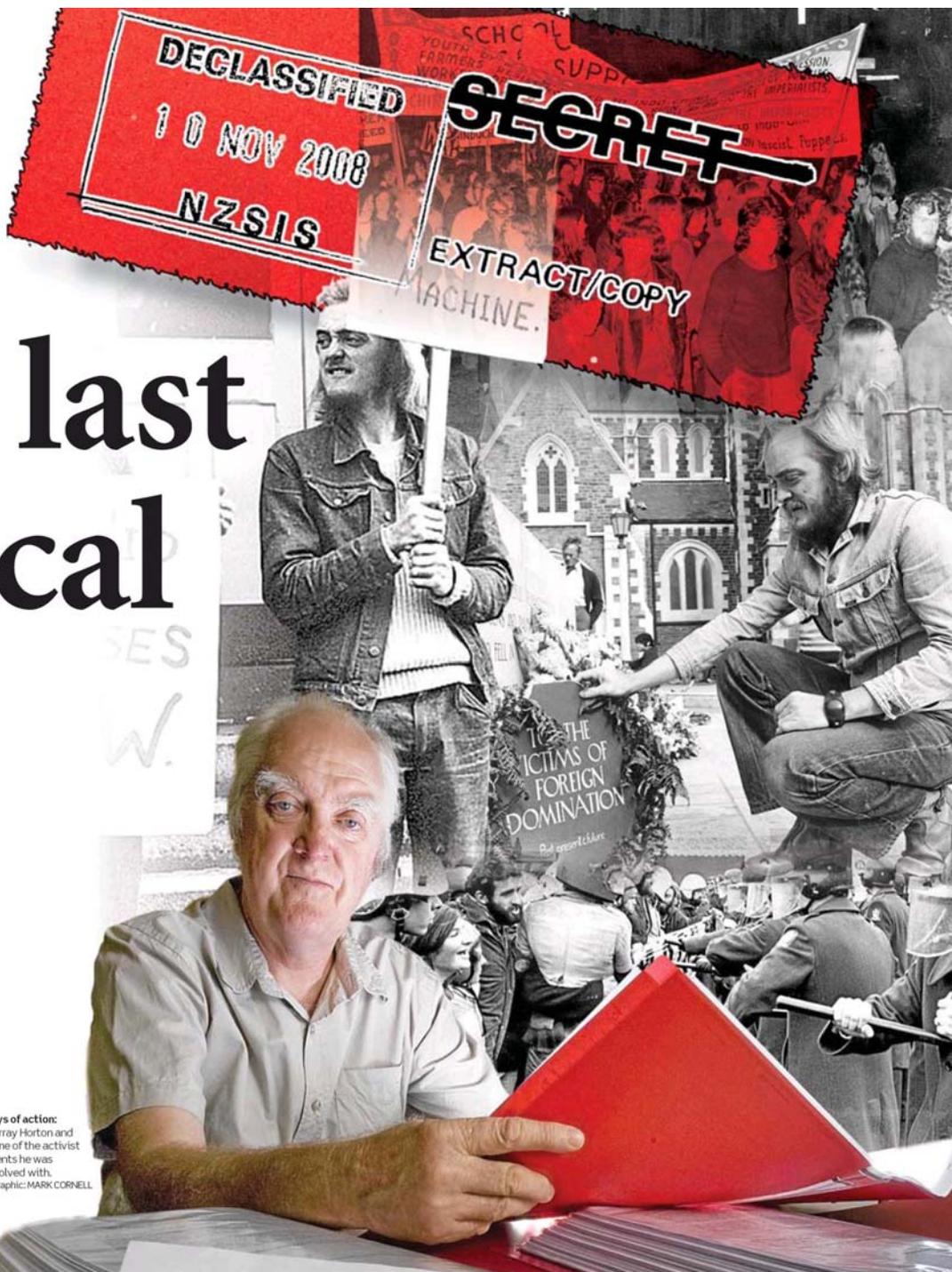
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But bourgeois hallmarks are misleading because Horton is much more than a living remnant from the era of radicals who scandalised and infuriated the staid and conformist New Zealand society of the 1970s.

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Days of action: Murray Horton and some of the activist events he was involved with. Graphic: MARK CORNELL



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» From D1

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His ideas have matured but he still regards himself as a radical.

"The fact I've achieved some security doesn't mean my social and political ideas have changed. I'm not an anarchist any more, but underlying all my work is a deep unease at the capitalist political and social system. I'm a socialist. I don't think capitalism and democracy are necessarily synonymous."

The glory days of protest and challenge featured a number of notable radicals but most have evolved into mayors, businesspeople, academics and cabinet ministers. Not Horton though. As former protest icon Tim Shadbolt says in his recent autobiography, *A Mayor of Two Cities*: "Murray Horton ... is probably the only protest leader from the 60s who remains continually active today as he campaigns against foreign control of New Zealand resources."

"I can do it," Horton says, "because the house is freehold, my wife works and I don't have any children." Recently Horton has been able to shake another label - that of "security threat". The

shedding of his danger-to-the-public status was confirmed by Security Intelligence Service (SIS) director Warren Tucker this week.

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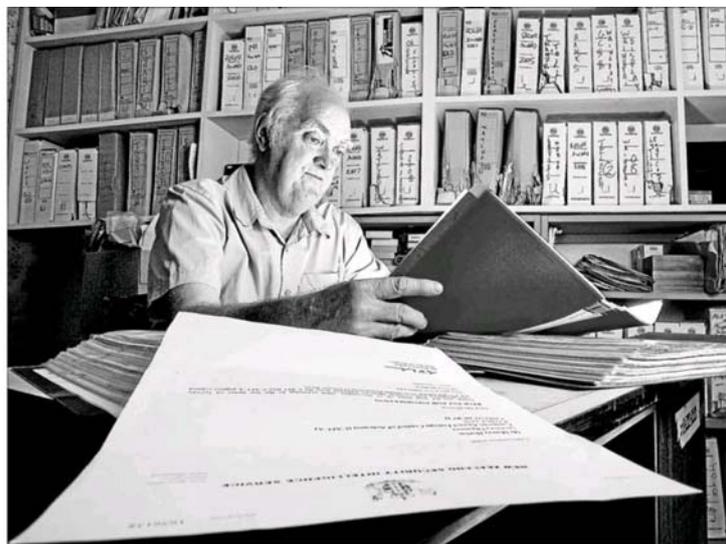
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On the record: Activist Murray Horton with SIS files. Photo: JOHN KIRK-ANDERSON

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Demonstration days: Anti-US base protesters in 1972. Bill Rosenberg is at far left; Murray Horton is second from left.

Article rank | 14 Feb 2009 | The Press

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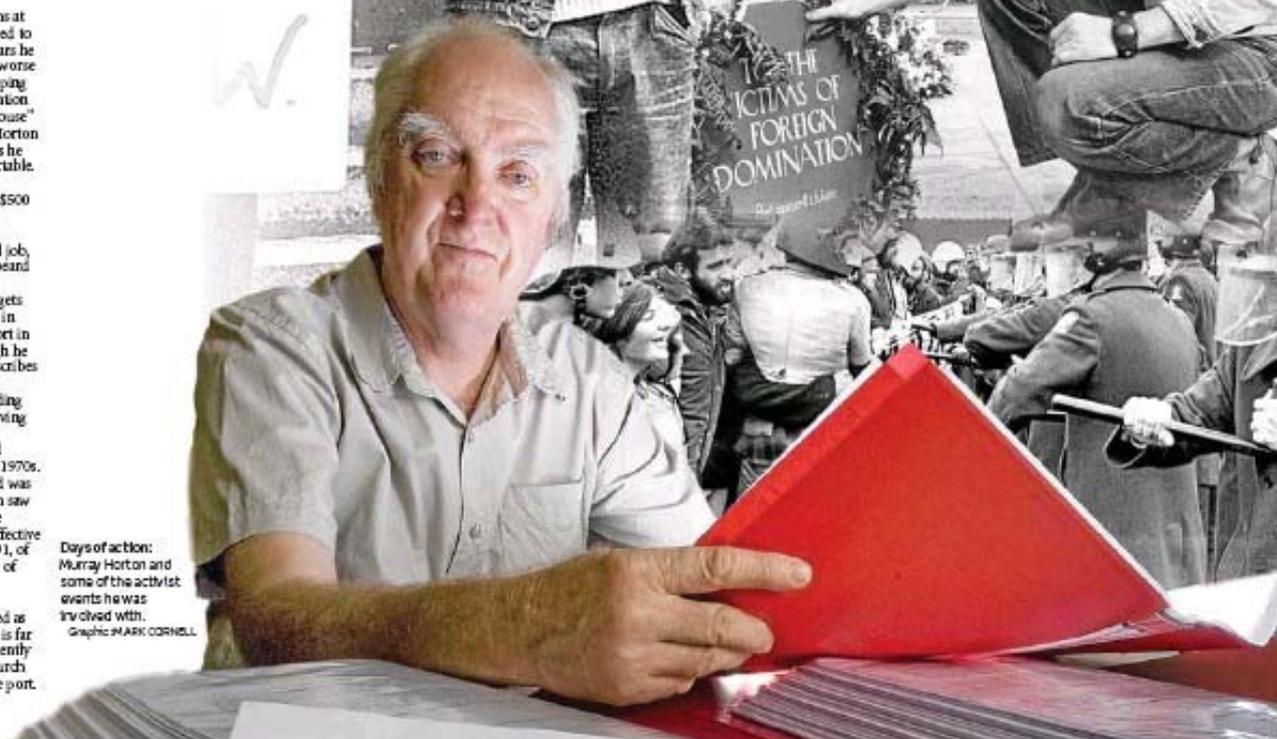
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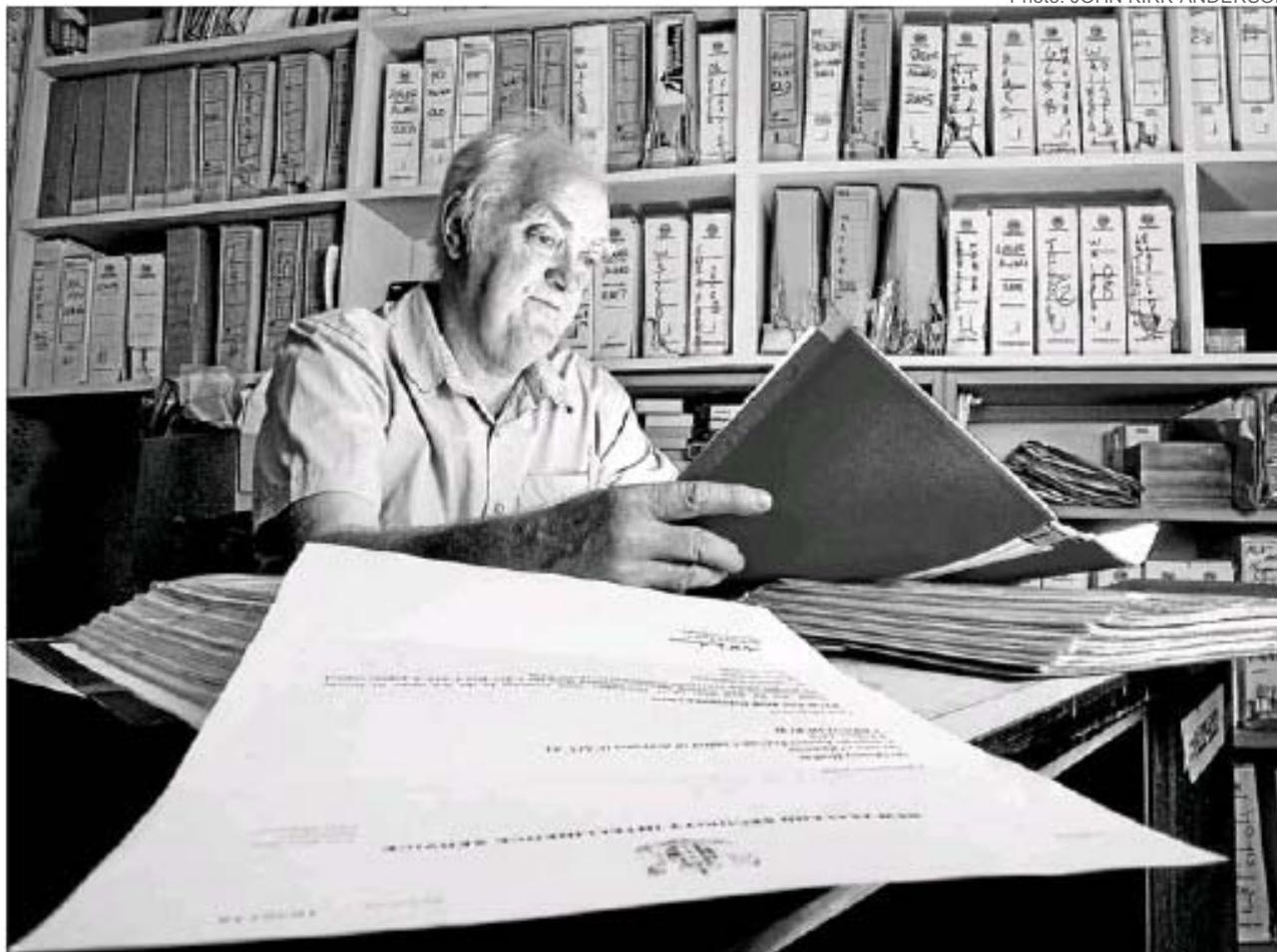
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"I got out by Wednesday. My crying mother gave me the taxi fare and held the door open."

He moved in with his girlfriend, Christine Bird, asking for a bed for two weeks and stayed 18 years. Although living in sin invited scorn, Horton remained straight-laced in other respects, never indulging in the drugs, commune living and free love which has epitomised the spirit of the times.

In conformist New Zealand anyone different was stomped on, and Horton, with his army great coat, given to him by his Irish Catholic neighbour who used it to keep his car engine warm, and his long hair, was a target.

"I would get guys stopping me in the street asking 'Are you a f . . . ing girl? Are you a queer?' "

Revolution was just around the corner, however. After a background in the Radical Students Alliance at Canterbury University, Horton became one of the leading lights in the much more active Progressive Youth Movement (PYM) which consisted mainly of young workers. In Auckland, the PYM was an offshoot of the New Zealand Communist Party, but in Christchurch the group was less doctrinaire.

Horton was a natural leader, says a colleague of the time who asks not to be named because "I'm not really a radical now".

"He had a great sense of humour and was great at the bold statement. He had to be pulled back sometimes but he could always laugh at himself. He was always very independent."

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