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1976

Wanganui Computer Centre

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## 1976 Wanganui Computer legislation passed

'Big Brother is watching'? The New Zealand government's establishment of the country's first centralised electronic database through the Wanganui Computer Act raised questions about the state's ability to gather information on its citizens.

The National Law Enforcement Data Base – better known as the Wanganui computer – allowed police, the Ministry of Transport and the justice system to share information for the first time.

When it was replaced in 2005 it recorded every motor vehicle registration, every driver's and firearms licence, every traffic and criminal conviction, and the personal details of hundreds of thousands of New Zealanders. Later, the Serious Fraud Office and authorised local authorities were also given access to the information stored at Wanganui.

In 1976 the Wanganui computer was regarded as ground-breaking. It was hailed as an efficient collaboration between agencies. The Minister of Police, Alan McCready, described it as 'probably the most significant crime-fighting weapon ever brought to bear against lawlessness in this country'.

Critics were unconvinced. Civil libertarians likened it to something from George Orwell's 1984 and mounted numerous protests against the system. The ultimate protest occurred in November 1982, when 22-year-old anarchist Neil Roberts was apparently blown up by his own gelignite bomb as he tried to breach security at the computer centre.

The Wanganui computer was accessed from hundreds of terminals around the country, at police stations, courts and Ministry of Transport offices. Over time justice-sector agencies began to develop in-house computing capacity. The Wanganui centre closed in 1995 and the Police began transferring all information from its system to a new National Intelligence Application system. In 2005 the Wanganui system was finally decommissioned.

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### External links

- [Farewell to Wanganui computer \(Computerworld\)](#)
- [Big Brother switched off \(NZ Herald\)](#)

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<http://www.nzhistory.net.nz/big-brother-is-watching-legislation-is-passed-establishing-the-wanganui-computer-centre>, (Ministry for Culture and Heritage), updated 30-Aug-2012

This Week in History



22 October 1972 Death of poet James K. Baxter





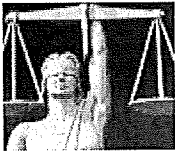
23 October 1915 Ten NZ nurses lost in *Marquette* sinking



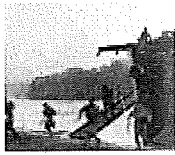
24 October 1913 Violence flares on Wellington wharves



25 October 1949 Foundation of IHC



26 October 1942 Women Jurors Act allows women to sit on juries



27 October 1943 NZ troops make first opposed landing since Gallipoli



28 October 1890 First Labour Day celebrations