



RICHARD S. HILL AND STEVEN LOVERIDGE

SECRET HISTORY

STATE SURVEILLANCE IN NEW ZEALAND, 1900–1956

The first volume in a history of spies and spying in New Zealand.

In 1900, a handful of New Zealand police detectives watched out for spies, seditious and others who might pose a threat to state and society. The Police Force remained the primary instrument of such human intelligence in New Zealand until 1956 when, a decade into the Cold War, a dedicated Security Service was created. Over the same period, New Zealand's role within signals intelligence networks evolved from the Imperial Wireless Chain to the UKUSA intelligence alliance (now known as Five Eyes).

The first of two volumes chronicling the history of state surveillance in New Zealand, *Secret History* opens up the 'secret world' of security intelligence through to 1956. It is the story of the surveillers who – in times of war and peace, turmoil and tranquillity – monitored and analysed perceived threats to national interests. It is also the story of the surveilled: those whose association with organisations and movements led to their public and private lives being documented in secret files.

Secret History explores a hidden and intriguing dimension of New Zealand history, one which sits uneasily with cherished national notions of an exceptionally fair and open society.

Richard S. Hill is the author of four books on the history of policing in New Zealand and two on Crown–Māori relations in the twentieth century (including *State Authority, Indigenous Autonomy and Maori and the State*, Victoria University Press, 2004, 2009). He has also written numerous articles, book chapters and papers, and has edited books and academic series. His research interests have focused on the interactions between the state and its subjects in New Zealand and empire. He is a Life Member of Clare Hall, Cambridge University, and Emeritus Professor at the Stout Research Centre for New Zealand Studies at Victoria University of Wellington/Te Herenga Waka.

Steven Loveridge is a historian whose research focuses on governance, security intelligence and war and society. The author of several books, he has been published in various scholarly journals and anthologies. His recent publications include the co-authored *The Home Front* (Massey University Press, 2019), an authoritative examination of New Zealand's social, political, economic and diplomatic experiences in the First World War, and content within *New Zealand's Foreign Service* (Massey University Press, 2022) and *Histories of Hate* (Otago University Press, 2023). He is a research fellow with the Security and Surveillance Project at the Stout Research Centre for New Zealand Studies at Victoria University of Wellington/Te Herenga Waka.



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in Twentieth-Century New Zealand, Volume I

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Preface

This book is the first major product of a project on the New Zealand state's surveillance of people and institutions seen as actual or potential threats to its interests. It covers the period when it was primarily the role of the New Zealand Police Force to undertake this task. *Secret History* will be followed by another work canvassing the years from 1956, when the New Zealand Security Service (later, the New Zealand Security Intelligence Service, or NZSIS) was established to undertake such duties, until the end of the twentieth century.

This first part of our project has proved to be a much longer exercise than we initially envisaged, essentially because of scarcity of information. What has been called the 'secret world' of security surveillance strives to remain secret, resisting the open inquiry that most historians have had the luxury of pursuing (including ourselves in our individual past projects). The 'covert world is an inhospitable and obstructive research terrain', leading to what has been identified as a 'missing dimension' in history.¹

A great deal of evidence has been destroyed, was never recorded in the first place, or remains classified for a number of reasons. The stated reasons focus on the need to prevent present-day enemies of the state gaining knowledge of surveillance methods, but include other factors such as protecting surveillers' identities, even those who died many decades ago. More broadly, security agencies consider that, in the words of a top New Zealand security official, 'even the smallest hints of how secret units operate can provide valuable information to opposing forces'.²

In view of this, it is not surprising that intelligence history remains nascent in New Zealand. The efforts of a handful of journalists, biographers, scholars and activists notwithstanding, the country lacks the detailed histories of intelligence agencies which have emerged in other countries (albeit constrained by problems relating to sources). While our attempt to fill this historiographical gap must remain 'a report on progress' – even more so than with most other historical endeavours – we have striven to capture the essence of state surveillance in the period covered in this work.

Our broad approach is chronological, but each chapter is internally thematised. After short introductory comments, we begin each with a contextual overview of the period covered. This is followed by a section on the state's surveilling agencies, and the institutional and policy framework within which they operated. The next section

provides extensive coverage of the modes of surveillance that were deployed, and examples of how these worked in practice. Such matters as how well the surveillers addressed the state's objectives, and the ramifications for the type of country New Zealand professed to be, are then assessed in a separate section, followed by brief concluding remarks.

Of course, no historical research is produced within a vacuum. The emphases and findings of historical works are generally influenced by the preoccupations of the times in which they are produced. While we have our own separate personal views on the issues we canvass, we belong to the school which stresses that historians need to test their hypotheses against all available evidence, and draw conclusions based upon it; and that those conclusions should strive to be objective, however elusive a goal that may be. This approach, however difficult for an examination of state surveillance, both reflects and assists us with the main aims of this book: to provide evidence about what happened, to work out why it happened and to assess its ramifications.

Suffice to say here that we believe our findings have implications for the way New Zealanders view their past. In particular, the existence and activities of the state's surveillers challenge some cherished beliefs about the relationship between power and public in New Zealand.

While researching this book, we were grateful for the assistance of the other two members of our original project team: Dr David Burke of the University of Cambridge Intelligence Seminar, an expert on British security intelligence history, and military historian David Filer in Wellington, who investigated aspects of signals intelligence history. We also thank Grace Millar, Redmer Yska, Aaron Fox and Denis Lenihan, who joined the project to conduct research on specific aspects of security intelligence, and the results have been published on our online *Security and Surveillance History Series*.

We thank, too, the numerous people who supplied us with material as they came across it. Much of this relates to our successor book, but Graeme Dunstall and Warwick Johnston, Drs Doug Munro and Jim Rolfe, and Professors Russell Campbell and Roger Boshier brought to our attention a considerable amount of material relevant to the current volume. Others provided access to information released by the NZSIS from their own personal files and/or those of family members. The most valuable information for our current purposes was kindly provided by Nick Bollinger, Beverley and Susan Price, Max Kelly, Jackie and Tina Matthews, Keith Locke, Maureen Birchfield, Gwyn Williams, Bill Rosenberg, Murray Horton, Barbara Einhorn, Clare Taylor and Nicola Saker.

Lastly, we thank those NZSIS staff who provided assistance, most particularly the Service's archivist 'Alex', who facilitated the release of various documents and organised interviews with retired officers. We are indebted, too, to those former NZSIS staff who provided valuable information and insight into the operations of the secret world but who, like 'Alex', must remain anonymous.

We are grateful to the successive directors of the Stout Research Centre for New Zealand Studies, Professors Lydia Wevers (who, sadly, died when this book was nearing completion), Kate Hunter and Brigitte Bönisch-Brednich for their help and encouragement. We also owe similar thanks to the acting directors during a period of transition at the Centre, Associate Professor Anna Green and Professor Jim McAloon. We would like to also thank our other colleagues at the Stout Centre for their discussion and insights, especially former Research Professor James Belich, Dr Brad Patterson and Kathryn Patterson; and the Stout Centre's administrator Debbie Levy for her support. We have discussed specific issues with various visiting scholars who have passed through the Centre since we began this research, especially former J. D. Stout Fellows Sarah Gaitanos and Nick Bollinger, and we thank them for their interest and assistance. Of course, errors, omissions and interpretations are entirely our own responsibility.

We are grateful to our families and friends for their interest and assistance. Richard Hill is indebted to his wife, Nicola Gilmour, for her loving support during this project – and getting him through the dark days of health difficulties in the middle of it. He has appreciated the support and interest of the circle which meets on Friday evenings in a Wellington pub (in recent years the Hotel Bristol, which happens to feature in a footnote in this book) to discuss many issues, some of them academic. Steven Loveridge is grateful for the patience extended by friends and family members during an investigation into a history murkier than any of his previous projects.

We owe especial gratitude to Drs Bob Tristram and Nicola Gilmour, David Filer and our publishers' anonymous readers, all of whom who gave us valuable feedback on our draft manuscript. We would especially like to thank Auckland University Press: its director Sam Elworthy (who has been supportive of the project since its inception), our editor Matt Turner and proofreader Mike Wagg, designer Kalee Jackson, the press's production manager Katharina Bauer, production assistant Lauren Donald and publishing associates Sophia Broom and Kapua O'Connor. Finally, we owe our deep gratitude to the Marsden Fund of the Royal Society of New Zealand for its generous funding support for the project.

*Richard S. Hill and Steven Loveridge
Stout Research Centre for New Zealand Studies
Victoria University of Wellington/Te Herenga Waka
April 2022*

‘Hill and Loveridge give us a fascinating examination of the underbelly of the New Zealand state, always alert to the tension between our assumptions of a tolerant society and the realities of “political policing”. . . Co-author Richard Hill is an established master of the art.’

— James Belich, Beit Professor of Imperial and Commonwealth History, University of Oxford

‘Fascinating revelations about both New Zealand’s secret history and the origins of today’s most important international intelligence alliance.’

— Professor Christopher Andrew, Cambridge University, author of *The Secret World*

‘This is an important work and a must-read for those seeking to understand the complex and contradictory nature of the New Zealand state . . . Secret History is destined to become a much-consulted, go-to book in its field.’

— Professor Kerry Taylor, Head of Humanities, Massey University

‘This thoroughly researched and well-written volume presents a vibrant account of New Zealand’s domestic security and intelligence apparatus in the first half of the twentieth century.’

— Professor Gregory S. Kealey, author of *Spying on Canadians* and co-author of *Secret Service*



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