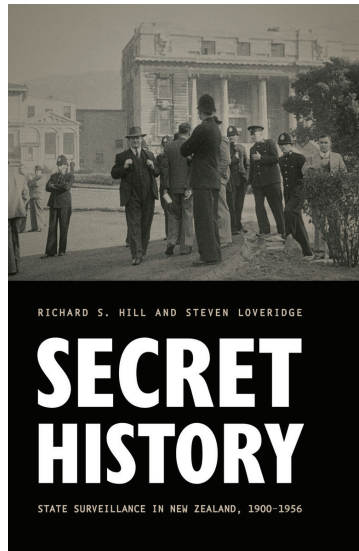


BOOK REVIEW:  
SECRET HISTORY: STATE SURVEILLANCE  
IN NEW ZEALAND, 1900-1956

Richard S. Hill and Steven Loveridge, *Secret History: State Surveillance in New Zealand, 1900-1956*. Auckland: Auckland University Press, 2023.



*Secret History: State Surveillance in New Zealand, 1900-1956* describes the evolution of political intelligence in New Zealand by focusing on policing institutions during the first half of the twentieth century. It aims “[t]o provide evidence about what happened, to work out why it happened, and to assess its ramifications” (xii). Illuminating hitherto hidden practices of this so-called secret world, its intended readership appears to be, on the one hand, historians of New Zealand’s past and, on the other, historians concerned with the origins and development of other Anglo-American intelligence institutions. In this respect, the book seeks to emulate and position itself alongside Cambridge University Emeritus Professor Christopher Andrew’s official histories and unauthorized accounts of British intelligence.

The book draws on a wealth of relevant empirical evidence, including official material that has not been previously available to researchers. The book's authors, Richard S. Hill and Steven Loveridge, obtained several tranches of declassified official information, but, as far as I can tell, they have not made that material widely available to other researchers. This means the book shares in, and reproduces, the official secrecy shrouding New Zealand intelligence activities. This also means that academics reviewing the book can only examine the material as it is presented in the book and are precluded from assessing the authors' use of this source. Moreover, the book draws heavily on research papers included in the Security and Surveillance History Series (available on the website of the Stout Research Centre for New Zealand Studies at Victoria University of Wellington/Te Herenga Waka), but it is unclear if these have all been blind peer-reviewed and are reliable sources of information and analysis. Finally, the endnotes illustrate the large extent to which the book relies on Hill's own earlier works on colonial policing.

The book is divided into five parts. The first part deals with concepts of 'political policing,' 'surveillance,' and the 'intelligence cycle' but is unconcerned about the strong functional connection between the New Zealand Government's surveillance and secret intelligence practices, and its use of violence against its perceived enemies, opponents, and rivals. The remaining four parts are distinguished by major international conflicts: Peace and War, 1990-1918; Latent Cold War, 1919-1939; Total War, 1939-1945; and Early Cold War, 1945-1956.

The four main parts are further divided into chapters, each of which is organised into sections on "Overview," "Agencies," "Operations," and "Assessment", and bookended by brief introductions and conclusions. Unfortunately, this structure renders the analysis of its primary-source material somewhat pedestrian, overly repetitive (thematically), and quite superficial. The chapters are largely descriptive and, at times, read like a systemic collation of information resembling political reportage or, at best, investigative journalism, rather than academic work that produces new scholarly knowledge advancing our collective understanding of intelligence as an important phenomenon in world affairs. Significantly, there is no central thesis offered here; that is, there is no argument inquiring into, and explaining, the deeper causes behind the New Zealand Government's development and use of its intelligence capability.

Given the book's aims this poor intellection astonishes me. Even though the book offers plenty of evidence of ongoing contestation among police and military professionals, and demonstrates the transnational foundations of New Zealand's intelligence work, the book retains, rather than rethinks, a narrow methodological nationalism, rendering this complex politico-social phenomenon less intelligible as an object of inquiry.

While this book fills an important gap in the existing literature narrating New Zealand's twentieth century past, it exemplifies several well-known deformities that mark the field of Intelligence Studies: that is, this book, like the field it engages, is state centric, Anglo-American, and fetishizes the intelligence cycle. Regrettably, the book would have been stronger had it been informed by an awareness of the recent scholarship which, making conceptual and theoretical advances in the field, offers

remedies for these deformities. Lacking the intellectual independence needed to challenge received wisdom and conventional thinking and eschewing its potential to watch the watchers and guards us from the guardians (see p.19), this book will likely please those security professionals who serve the state without question, but it will not help foster a society of informed citizens. In my view, this book has not risen to meet the urgent and difficult task of making sense of this complex issue. Let's hope the second volume, which will focus on the New Zealand Security Service / New Zealand Security Intelligence Service, moves beyond, rather than entrenches, these deficiencies.

Damien Rogers  
Centre for Defence and Security Studies  
Massey University