

# Transcript: An Open Conversation on A Secret History

Kia ora and welcome to the NZHistory podcast channel. This podcast is about a book released in July 2023, called *Secret History: State Surveillance in New Zealand* by Richard Hill and Steven Loveridge.

This book is the first of two volumes which will chronicle the history of state surveillance in New Zealand. The first book opens up the 'secret world' of security intelligence from 1900 to 1956 – which was a period in which those duties were primarily handled by the New Zealand Police Force.

This is a recording of an event hosted by the Stout Research Centre for New Zealand Studies at Victoria University of Wellington in October 2023. The authors Richard Hill and Steven Loveridge, discussed their book in a conversation guided by historian Malcolm McKinnon. This was followed by a Question and Answer session with the audience, many of whom had assisted the authors with their research.

## **SPEAKERS**

Brigitte Bonisch-Brednich, Richard Hill, Steven Loveridge, Malcolm McKinnon, Audience members

### **Brigitte Bonisch-Brednich**

Tena koutou katoa, ko Brigitte Bonisch-Brednich ahau. I'm the Director of the Stout Research Center, and for people who don't know me yet. Thankyou Selwyn for the lovely start of our seminar, and it's the second this year of our new pop-up series on Open Book Conversations. And I'm really glad it has two stellar historians from the Stout involved, Richard Hill and Steven Loveridge's *Secret History*. The biggest book launch ever in Unity Books. And today, we're following that up with an Open Conversation. And the eminent historian Malcolm MacKinnon will lead this and chair the conversation.

### **Malcolm McKinnon**

Everyone, thank you for those kind words. And thank you particularly to Selwyn for providing the mihi to the three of us. It's a great pleasure to be asked to steer this discussion about the book - it came with a slight burden, which was to read 385 pages, gripping stuff every line. And I've just been told - there's code on the cover. So who's to say what else the other secrets there are?

### **Malcolm McKinnon**

So the idea is that I'm going to basically got three or four topics I would like to cover off - and greetings to the people online as well - and encourage Steven and Richard to respond and answer those questions, depending on how it goes we'll go into the next one. At some point, we'll open it up for questions from the floor. But you're also very welcome to put your hand up and ask questions. I see many people who had either direct or indirect experience of the security services. I've had some myself but I won't go into that and we'll see how it goes. This will run for about an hour and 20 minutes or something back there. So what I first wanted to start off with is simply give the authors a chance to tell

us what gave rise to the book. And also because I think it's really important in a subject like this to tell us a little bit about the research challenge of writing publicly about something that is intended to be secret. Over to you.

### **Richard Hill**

Right, well, I suppose I should start with me is a young person is really interested in social control, particularly coercive social control. And at the odd demonstration against apartheid and the Vietnam War and so on, there was always a person or two lurking around taking notes and photos occasionally. And I thought, yeah, I must pursue this further at some point. Then I took up the job of writing the history of policing in New Zealand and I kind of stopped that at the fourth volume. But during that time, I was able to get into secret policing to a greater degree than was probably warranted because this was a 19th century early 20th century. But I always wanted to pursue that and the Marsden grant allowed me to do that.

### **Richard Hill**

And just in essence, the nexus between ordinary policing and 'political policing', as we call it, we avoid the term secret policing, the nexus is that policing is about surveillance. In essence - how do you control a society? You surveil, basically. And that's what police patrols are all about. And that's what the specialist detection service that arose out of policing in the late 19th century represented. So perhaps I'll stop at that. And Steven to kind of take it from there, and we can then both talk about the research challenge.

### **Steven Loveridge**

Well, I was going to move straight on to them, if you don't mind. I came onto the project as a research assistant and found myself as a co-author. But the interesting thing is, when I started, that, I guess I had the general knowledge that someone might have from just generally reading the paper, I'd heard of five eyes, I'd vaguely heard of something called SIGINT, you couldn't quite get out of me what it meant. In the last couple of years have been a process of moving up a learning curve. Delving into various files, talking to various people, some of whom are in this room, that Richard and I owe a lot to for bringing the book to this point. But the basis of the research challenge comes from various areas, security studies, surveillance studies, are both very young disciplines. There's a quality of young disciplines where they multiply their terminology, everyone picks their own terms and often defines them a little bit differently. And as you move up that learning curve of knowledge, you realise that you're sort of leaving behind some of the places you've come from. And that means there's a bit of a gap, in trying to explain what you're trying to do. And one of the reasons we wanted to throw together this event was for someone like Malcolm, who we are delighted to have MC-ing this, can kind of bring that out to an audience again, and try and make you remind yourself of what you've learned that other people haven't come on this journey with you.

### **Malcolm McKinnon**

And what about the fact that is in the domain of being secret? That you're not going into an area where there's heaps of open access information, and you have to judge then how you go about making a story that may have omissions, and you have to somehow explain and create something for them?

**Richard Hill**

I suppose one of the main themes is the age old one of 'who watches the watchers'. And so how do you watch watchers who are watching you and society in general, when they don't want their watching known about at the time it happened, or subsequently. So that's an incredible research dilemma. So you get fragments from here and there. And as Steven mentioned, there's seven or eight people in this room who've helped us. And there are some files available. The institutions give you what they want to give you. But equally speaking, they give you really good information and the Security Intelligence Service, they've been quite helpful to us actually. So that was one pleasing matter we found. And I think I suppose the other research question pervades the book. And that is, New Zealand has a national narrative, right from 1840 really being a free and fair and just and open society? And so how do you study the history of secret state forces looking at people their political activities and their personal lives? How do you reconcile the perception of a just society, a just and open society, with political policing?

**Steven Loveridge**

I think the only thing I'd add, many people in this room will know what it's like to try and piece together a history and how you use your sources. A practical example of this would be there were so many pieces in this book where suddenly a new document becomes available, and you have to reinterpret things a new wrinkle to the timeline. I think we had to rewrite the bit about the foundation of the SIS, the security service in Nov 1956 a couple of times, because we keep finding, 'wait a minute, this is a new player in this drama', we need to include this and recognise that some of these ideas that we were attributing to one area have actually been discussed beforehand in another meeting, in some cases, there's a timeline that needs to be revised, there are more subtleties in some concepts that we haven't quite appreciated in earlier drafts. And doubtless more information will become available at various times. And that will lead to new revelations and findings. This is very much an example of an ongoing history.

**Malcolm McKinnon**

Just before going on, you mentioned about the reasonably responsive stance of the SIS itself. Do you think that is if some point of which there would have become true and would not have been true some years back, but otherwise it would not have been practical.

**Richard Hill**

Yes. It took them till the 21st century for people to be able to ask for their files. And when they get them, they're heavily redacted. And some people still can't get them for various reasons.

**Malcolm McKinnon**

I want to lead on from that just, I mean, for me, the richest part of the book was uncovering if you like that, anthropology of surveillance world, I mean, the stuff where you get into the actual, you know, politics of it is in a way more familiar and probably more familiar to most people who will read the book, but that sense of, you know, almost Le Carre type sense of what this world was like. And so I'd like you to comment a little bit about the process by which you put that together, which presumably does not come so much from personnel files about people who were surveilled, but by your understanding of the mechanics of the people who worked with the system. And, what I found was, in some respects, the ordinariness of so much going on, so the amount they just, you know, cut out things from newspapers, you know, responded to comments from the public or spent a lot of time just vetting people. So it's that

sort of sense of a gray world alongside the more cloak and dagger dramatic ones. So just putting your thoughts about how you put that together.

### **Steven Loveridge**

I'm really glad that came across, there was so many times I think we're, there's a particular reading of a source. And we've got to get that one. And the one that comes to mind was, towards the end of the book, is a comment from the British High Commission on a Russian or Soviet personnel who has been appointed to the mission who was known to be a spy master. And the sort of language is (Vladimir Putin, but not the one you're thinking of) the language was 'you're best to accept him, otherwise, they'll just send someone else to do his work. If you really don't want him just don't comment, and they'll know what that means'. It's just absolutely the kind of ethos around us about how these sorts of things should be handled. But your larger comment, or being about the sort of feel of this work is that I think the general conception people have is on one hand a James Bond. These are thrillers, these are big, larger than life dashing kind of things. And the other famous fictional version of this is like [?], it's a bit more tattered and battered, and these things are more banal. And absolutely, it's about cutting things out of newspapers, it's about the ongoing watch, people are maintaining, and the careers spent and doing lots of little things that add up and play out in various ways,

### **Richard Hill**

And it's an extraordinary life really being a political policeman. And they were mean, you were living a double life. And that's really hard to do spoken to various former operatives on this. And you're in the middle of a political meeting, where people are talking about peace issues, or environmental issues, and you don't know anything about them. Remember, this is when the police did secret work, and the entry into the police force at the time was very low standard four or standard five. So they don't know all that much about these kinds of issues. And yet they have to try and summarize them for a report. And you will see sometimes comments like 'he went on and on. And I had to go back and try and write it all up' and you also have to infiltrate - either the political policeman or one of his agents - will have to go to a political meeting, or a social discussion where there's alcohol consumed in and then go away and write that up when they're still, you know, well basically they're pissed. And that leads to all kinds of embellishments and exaggerations and misunderstandings, which can lead to consequences for people's lives and careers. And, you know, I wouldn't want to minimize the easiest of a job, I mean, sorry, the difficulty of it. Because it takes a certain skill to live a double life, or sometimes, you know, a quadruple life. Yeah, the famous spy Burgess at a quintuple life.

### **Malcolm McKinnon**

Did most of them have lengthy times of political police was something of once you got into was relatively hard to exit, back to something else. Because if you became publicly known as someone who worked for the police, then people would realize, looking back, he would have had this dubious status as a police informant or something.

### **Steven Loveridge**

There's a comment made in the book that doing undercover work in New Zealand is a particular challenge, given that it's such a small society, and everyone knows one another. But people will run under agent names and did take up identities. And these stories don't always end well. I should just

backfill a little bit that the boundaries of this book are 1900 - 1956, which is a period in which the New Zealand police force is primarily in charge of this human intelligence work. 1956 is the year the service was formed. So the political policemen Richard just mentioned, were informants who are being run, or agents, informants, as we define them have a more casual relationship with the authorities. But these agents were being either recruited and sent into the circles or were in the circles and found themselves having some relationship with the police.

### **Richard Hill**

Sometimes their handlers who infiltrate too and sometimes the handlers and the agents and the informants might take up quite a major position in an organization.

### **Malcolm McKinnon**

There's one very good episode about them being asked to make a complaint to the police.

### **Richard Hill**

Yes, yes, yes.

### **Steven Loveridge**

My favorite one was having two agents within I can't remember which branch of the party, the communist party it was. But one agent wrote a report which commented that the other agent, which he didn't know was an agent, was 'doubtlessly the most dangerous communist in the country'. The handler ended up showing that report to the agent in question and saying, 'well, you're clearly fitting in very well'.

### **Richard Hill**

Yes. And I suppose at this point, seeing we're talking about the people who did the job, we should note that we take a kind of holistic approach to the state surveilling on people. So that includes military intelligence, when they surveilled people, it includes the censors, the customs, post office. So we're not just looking at human intelligence in terms of the police force, and its various political detectives. We're talking about all surveillance.

### **Malcolm McKinnon**

One of the things that comes through in the book is the way you know, when you're talking about institutional history that the police hung on to this role, through a number of challenges, right up to 1956. Do you see that? Is this a classic sort of turf war thing where an organization isn't interested in holding on to something and doesn't wish to go, so the episode of the SID and obviously in the Second World War, but even the sort of slow disintegration in the 50s. I'd be just interested in your thoughts whether this created a distinctive New Zealand history of policing because the police retained this role for so long.

### **Steven Loveridge 29:36**

I mean, that's certainly one thing I saw as framing this volume, is that it is a period in which the New Zealand Police force was primarily in charge of this and yes, I absolutely sort of the turf warfare that goes on. After the First World War. there's a sort of initial push to maybe build some kind of MI5 style

service in New Zealand, which it looks like the police basically headed off to maintain the role in this that comes out again during the Second World War in which there is a professional security service formed, doesn't end well. I will leave you to read the book to find out what happens - but ends in a bit of a fiasco. In 1949, there's another sort of push for maybe looking at professionalizing security across the Commonwealth. New Zealand resists that, at time the police continue. Again in 1951 there is a movement to professionalize security. Again, it's headed off. And then 1956 will kind of add the consequences of events leading up to 1956, that is the end of police-led policing, or sorry, I'll get that right - it's the end of a system primarily led by the police. Police maintain a role in intelligence up to the present. For reasons that are quite hard to really unpack but it seems like they basically ran out of steam and then almost willingly surrendered at the end.

### **Richard Hill**

Yeah, there is one quite pertinent comment by a senior officer, who actually is the smallness of New Zealand as being a problem. They didn't have many, but they're working through an institution at that time, called the Special Branch established in 1949. And the special branch that kind of all its agents and informers, informants, and operatives are kind of getting known, because they weren't all that many of them. And people would say, 'Oh, hang on, you know, I saw him in the police station the other day, what's he doing in a political meeting?'. And the catchment of the work was getting bigger and bigger, particularly after the Second World War. When the political detectives want a kind of all of knowledge approach to any single person they were looking at, they wanted to know everything about all their friends, what pubs they drank at whether they were black-mailable, anything like that. So the net ever expanded, and it got ever deeper too, into the lives of people. And I wonder if this is the time of talk about the people who were surveilled? Perhaps first, before that, we should talk about just because we were talking about informants and so on. The political police relied a huge amount on information from inside. And in the..

### **Malcolm McKinnon**

Inside, from protest organizations?

### **Richard Hill**

Yeah, sorry. And so they would kind of have informants who volunteered. Sometimes they put an informant and or an agent. And the acronym is **MICE**. And so these are the reasons why you give information secretly to the state.

The first one is 'Money'. And they did they paid people, not very much, a pittance actually. Then another one's 'Ideology'. It's cases, for example, during the various industrial disputes of workers inside the union movement, getting dissatisfied with the leadership of the union, thinking that they kept a strike going for too long or whatever. So they kind of right wing unionists to then give information. Then there's 'Compromise' or 'Coercion', meaning that someone has done something which compromises them and makes them black-mailable, or whatever. And then sometimes the police will come in and coerce them on the basis of that activity. And I think we've got one or two cases of that, the chap from the Hutt Valley [...] Henry Guy. And his wife has left them and the police say, well, we'll look for her for you if you give us information about the Communist Party and then they become a bit more coercive when he's not quite playing ball.

**Malcolm McKinnon**

What's the 'E'?

**Richard Hill**

'E' is 'Ego'. Some people just love being spies and are flattered.

**Malcolm McKinnon**

Before we go on, does anyone want to comment at this point about these sorts of things that Steven and Richard have raised? Or personal testimony? While I wait, what I want to go onto leads with quite naturally out of that I was going to talk a little bit about people. But I think this is more interesting - you talk about the elements of continuity, which is partly about the police themselves having that central role in human intelligence. But you also talk about the ideological consistency. And that's essentially a story about anti-communism. And on the face of it, it seems really odd, because you had World War, which was not against a communist enemy, you had the 1920s, depression, and another war, which is not against a communist enemy. And then you had the Cold War. But the argument is all through this notion of a suspicion of communism, or its precursors was almost a central idea amongst the political police. And so raises to me a couple of questions, which, obviously, anyone would think about, why the persistence over such a long period of time? What does it tell us that straddled even the incoming Labour government in 1935? And what does it tell us about the public, you know, you use this phrase Mythscape the extent to which the public as a whole bought into this ideology, to the extent that it was seen as something not just private thing of the political police, but part of the public discourse and examined life? Why don't people rise up and say, this is all just absolute bullshit, and we shouldn't be chasing communists like this and in fact communism is a really good ideology, and it would make life much better in New Zealand, that never got much of a look in at all. So I'm just interested in your thoughts about this hegemonic, if you like, narrative that seems to have informed the police and the wider society?

**Steven Loveridge**

Tell me if I've got the right end of the stick on this. One of the lines I like in the book that I think, framed this is a complete history onto itself was if you looked at what the authorities were trying to do at the start of this history in 1900. And if you look at what they were trying to do in 1956, at the end of this history, we argued that a person in charge of political policing in 1900 would quite readily understand what's happening in 1956 - you're keeping an eye out for foreign agents, who may be involved in various gathering various information that might be of interest to foreign governments, and you're interested in, broadly speaking, what you might call the revolutionary left. And the names change a little bit. A person in 1900, would have to learn what - they would know what a communist was - but they would have to know what a Soviet Communist was. But that's the case of continuity across this, the watchers largely maintain the same modus operandi in this time, though, there are various complications, which maybe Richard can tease out. But you mentioned the role of the public.

**Malcolm McKinnon**

Well, that, you know, this was mobilized in a very public way, immediately after the First World War, immediately after the Second World War, you get the sense that, by and large, the public accepted this

narrative, and so that raises questions which obviously is based on different fields, but I'm just interested in your thoughts.

### **Steven Loveridge**

I think there's two points which seem wonderfully, slightly paradoxical. In a way one would be that most of the public don't know about. There's a line in the book, something along the lines of most law abiding New Zealanders don't have a favorable view on anything that that is akin to pimping, meaning in their time, anything unseemly. And that was the authorities talking about this isn't, we really shouldn't make this public. The second thing is there is a strand across this history, where the general public will accept security measures if they think it is necessary to secure the public good. There's a poem, I'm not going to rehearse it off the top of my head, but it's a thing in 1880 to the effect of rip out these communists these revolutionaries and throw them over your neighbor's fence, which I guess is Australia with respect to trans-Tasman harmony, and that, that also continues, it's definitely seen during both World Wars, it seen during the Depression, we need strong measures in order to preserve the good society that exists here.

### **Malcolm McKinnon**

But then here's the nub, isn't it, because in both World Wars, our enemy was not supposedly a revolutionary communist enemy. And yet most of the surveillance secret from the way I read the book after the first few months of the First World War, and to some extent, right to the Second World War was of people who were on the left of the political spectrum.

### **Steven Loveridge**

Sure, although the case we also lay out is during the Second World War, from the perspective of security intelligence, that this is an Anti-Hitler front, not so much as a love for communism.

### **Richard Hill**

It's crystal clear to me reading New Zealand history and reading vast amounts of sources, original sources, that there was this mythscape of openness and freedom and fairness, we were often said to be the best country in the world because of these wonderfully favorable attributes. And, of course, a bit later on, you know, we had 'the best race relations in the world', remember? And so there were these tropes that were believed by most of society insofar as you can tell from the sources. And we, as you will see, we've got quite a few footnotes in here! We, we kind of peg everything we say, down to sources, and I think you'll find that that there was such a myth. But it wasn't necessarily true.

### **Steven Loveridge**

I would just echo the previous point that yeah, even the authorities behind closed doors, in their own words, 'we should be careful how this is handled, because the public won't go for it'. It's certainly something that they thought that they had to be aware of that our New Zealand saw itself and I'll leave it there.

### **Malcolm McKinnon**

We might come back to that [...] but I just wanted to correct that. 1935 and, you know, some notion why do we not preoccupation with right wing threats to the state and it's interesting in Australia and 1929-



1931 there's no doubt that the real threat to the state, when the Labour governments was office in two states was from the right, forces like the New Guard and so on. Labour comes in New Zealand in 1935, and you don't get any sense that there is a suspicion of a concern to shape the political policing, that's what I take out of your study. And I'm interested in what you think about that, because after it all it reverberates a little bit at the present day, you know, when the authorities were very preoccupied with, you know, Islamic terrorism, threats from China and so on. And then what do we get we get an attack on a Mosque. So I don't want you to get into that, but to think about it back in the 1930s time that you write about.

### **Steven Loveridge**

I suppose one aspect of it would be that a mass, right wing or fascistic movement doesn't really get going in the way of the New Guard or the way those movements unfolded in Europe. There are some declassified files that show a sort of bubbling of various movements with conspiratorial ideas, anti-semitic ideas, that kind of conspiratorial thinking is a lot more prevalent in that time than were previously recognized. I think there's some really interesting new scholarship being done on that. So they do attract some security concern. There are files on them. But you're right. I mean, the predominant focus is towards the communist left.

### **Richard Hill**

Or the socialists, including the Labour Party, who came to power, then things changed a bit.

### **Malcolm McKinnon**

Well you're right, its very interesting that a Labour Government and indeed, you imply, any government, once it takes office tends to realize how useful security services can be. Do you want to comment on that? Because it is a very telling passage in the book, I think,

### **Richard Hill**

Well, I suppose coming through to the next volume. Governments from time to time, including the Lange government, very strong on abolishing the SIS or bringing it to account. And they don't.

### **Steven Loveridge**

Do you want to also mentioned there was a change of the police commissioner? I mean, this is, in the course of our history 1935 is a very curious election, where you suddenly had a government composed of individuals, some of whom have been very much on security's radar for decades, who was suddenly, technically in charge of this whole thing.

### **Richard Hill**

Some of them were jailed for up to two years in the war. So you had a [police] commissioner who had come down hard on dissidents, and protesters, and rioter and that during the Depression, [...] but he can't take the fact that he is a government that was well, basically antithetical to everything he believed them. So he pretty quickly got out. And a new commissioner, Dennis Cummings comes in, and he can work new government, and the new government realized they can work with him, particularly because they had enemies on their left - John A Lee and co - and the wonderful broadcast Scrimgeour - Uncle Scrim. And so they needed these guys to be watched quite closely. And Scrim was one of those who

was, they were came down very heavily on him and tried to destroy his career, which is one theme of the book - that careers suffer, people suffer.

### **Steven Loveridge**

John A Lee's party also attracted some attention.

### **Malcolm McKinnon**

I wanted to probe a little bit about the way you deal with the Empire, the British Empire, and you have a distinction, which is logical between domestic concerns and what you call external concerns. As I said, up until the Second World War, MI5, for instance, which was set up in 1909, its task was 'domestic', but that included the whole British Empire, so they were looking at India and Ireland and Egypt, Malaya, and presumably New Zealand and Australia. And so the notion of what was intelligence security doing and the wider world wasn't in a sense just about combatting Germans, Japanese, Italians or whatever there's also about keeping the Empire together and then involve targeting revolutionaries, radical independence nationalists, across the Empire. That's a little bit out of sight in your book. And I wondered whether it was because the police, being the police, weren't really attuned to that kind of thinking. And they were the ones who are handling political policing. And their links from what you describe were more with Scotland Yard than they were with MI5. But anyway, I'd like you to comment on that.

### **Steven Loveridge**

Well after World War One, they had been a push to get an MI5-style organisation in New Zealand when the police edged that off links between MI5 in New Zealand were largely handled for the military. As far as we can tell, literally, it's just been some documents that I came across in various files that seemed to spell that out. The other major link is SIGINT.

### **Malcolm McKinnon**

Which is something that you can explain to the audience.

### **Steven Loveridge**

David, I'll ask you to correct me if I've got this right or wrong. But I would say in a nutshell, SIGINT is the intersection and analysis of electronic transmissions and emissions. In this time, it's largely linked to wireless telegraphy, radio waves, if you have a receiver, a broadcaster and a receiver, you can intercept that message along the way. And this becomes a major means of intelligence as radio waves are increasingly used for mass communication. There's one operation Operation Mask, I think, from 1934 to 1937, in which British intelligence is intercepting radio waves sent from the British Communist Party to Moscow, largely for the purpose of organizing Comintern operations around the world. And this leads to information about who in New Zealanders getting paid out of Comintern - an address in Petone, by the way comes up. And a few New Zealanders who were going to Moscow to attend the Lenin International School. I don't think we found the receipts showing that this intelligence was forwarded to Wellington. But presumably, someone was being informed of this. So, I'll leave it there, I'll let Richard speak up. But this is how this idea of globalized intelligence structures have a history.

### **Richard Hill**

One of those receiving money from the Comintern, was Leo Sim from Palmerston North and the police here we're watching him all the time. So whether or not they received information, we don't know. But he was within the radar.

### **Richard Hill**

Shall I just address the point about Māori more generally? Māori were the main targets of surveillance and coercion in the 19th century. And during actual wars, military intelligence came to the forefront, but mostly it was police who were keeping a watch on very various Māori Resistance movements, and Māori, who were dissatisfied with the state for whatever reason, particularly losing all their land, which was pretty serious reason to become problematic from the state's perspective. But then, after New Zealand ceased to be a colony, the police were watching movements, which were a danger to the state, the Ratana movement, in particular. Ratana preached unity of Māori and honoring the Treaty of Waitangi. That was definitely cause for being watched. They also had links to some Japanese thinkers, which was seen increasingly to be a problem in the 1930s, for obvious reasons.

And Steven and I talk about the interwar period as being the latent Cold War. But I suppose it, it wasn't just cold war, it was watching anyone considered a danger to the state. And that's the beauty of policing, doing this kind of thing, in a sense, because police, particularly in those days, were all purpose agents of the state. So they did whatever was needed. And so the people who are cracking heads, in the 1913 general strike or during the Depression, are the same people who are watching for subversives who are allegedly inciting the poor and the oppressed.

And they're also worried about external agents, in effect, influencing Māori to resist. And you see that coming through in the early 20th century, you see that in the 19th century. They don't really find any evidence, but they're always interested in looking for it, because they can't really believe and if I come back to the concept of the just and open society, and I think, and Jamie Belich, by the way, carries that through quite well. But if you come back to the concept of the open and just society, clearly, Māori are not experiencing it as such, and this continues, so Māori continued to be watched, when the state believed they need to be watched.

### **Audience member**

I have a question. And an observation, which I'd enjoy your comments on. The question relates to your description of the methods of surveillance.

What I wondered was whether in New Zealand there's any evidence that police... [as the UK police...] in other words that they concocted covert relationships, sexual relationships, personal relationships, mostly with women, mostly in the anti nuclear and other peace movements. That's my question - whether that there's any evidence of that in New Zealand.

The comment was - Steven, you said that the reason that right wing movements didn't come into focus for surveillance in New Zealand was because they weren't as developed as in some European countries. But I would contend and I don't know, I'd be interested in your comments, that all regimes of all types focus pretty exclusively on left wing political engagement, and activism. And I think that's big. I

mean, as, as an activist myself, that's been a complaint among activist circles forever. And it came out very, very clearly in the case of the Christchurch massacre.

**Steven Loveridge**

I'll briefly take the first point. I like that you've raised this because it's indicative of how we frame some of these things, that intelligence, in a pure sense, is about taking information, subjecting it to analysis and producing intelligence -information plus analysis equals intelligence. And that is, in a sense, documents. But so much of what we're looking at is actually people who were charged with doing intelligence 'doing stuff' in the real world. It's not simply about watching, it's about doing. Richard and I talked back and forth, as I recall it on instances in which, as you mentioned, intelligence agencies, they have gone beyond simply watching but want to affect their targets. The one that comes to mind is an order of making sure this gentleman know he's being watched. But I think that's the most we got we were keeping an eye out for things like that. But I can't recall anything going beyond that in this period.

**Audience member**

I come back to your comment Malcolm about the British push for Empire control over intelligence issues. The post Second World War period is really interesting for us person cause constant conferences to discuss military intelligence, they send people around the world to meetings and various dominions and elsewhere. And the whole theme is to have a new intelligence network, controlled by Britain. And this is fascinating, because you can see they can see their power diminishing. They don't say the Americans are coming. I know there are a couple of comments on those lines. But the whole aim is to bring it back under British control. And Australia says to them over one of the proposals to set up the Defence Intelligence Centre in Australia, Australia says, 'oh, yeah, we' re for that, but it will be manned by Australians and run by Australians'. So you can see the push back and in fact of course by mid 1950s they've lost the battle, the British have lost the battle.

**Malcolm McKinnon**

They in a sense, they wanted the resources of the Dominions to support a British led...

**Audience member**

Yeah, we didn't push back that much because we didn't have the resources of Australia but the Australians did.

**Brigitte Bonisch-Brednich**

Okay, can you tell us a little bit about how they went about immigrants? And if there's a constant, you know, like, maybe a continuation there, too. I mean, most of us know about surveillance of Jewish refugees, Jewish immigrants in the 1930s and 40s, but does it actually apply for the whole period?

**Steven Loveridge**

Absolutely, I mean, there's a history here. Again, I'll bang the same drum, I've said that one of the things I like about this history is it has a framework that pulls things into a larger history and post 1956 you get various new issues that people are considered of a security concern. But in this particular time period, immigration is considered one of the ways in which security could be threatened. You're letting people into the country and some of these people may not share your values, they may have agendas

or be up to all sorts of 'devilish foreign-ish things'. And that becomes a point of security concern. It's interlinked with Empire there are blacklists that are shared between the Metropol and New Zealand. There are particular communities, Yugoslavs, the Irish, probably competing for a prize place, Chinese towards the end of the period and increasingly coming under concern Germans during two world wars. Even some of the British are a bit worrying.

**Richard Hill**

Yeah. People who don't 'buy into our values' or are presumed not to buy into our values.

**Audience member**

When I was at university here, there's a student friend of mine was an agent. And what I'm interested in is the veracity of information received, you know 'rubbish in rubbish out'. We knew he was an agent. He wasn't trying to keep it quiet. And we knew that the information he was funneling back was misleading, inaccurate. If it's about collating information during the analysis, and then that becomes the intelligence. How do you stop it from being fraud? And not misleading the intended community that is affected by it.

**Steven Loveridge**

That is an excellent question. I think it's indicative that intelligence, like writing history, like journalism, is only going to be as good as the information going in, and only going to be as good as the analysis being applied to it. If you have flaws in what information you're taking in, if you have flaws in analysis, you're going to get faulty intelligence. And I think this is probably perennial. It's always going to be a question and you're always going to have intelligence failures resulting from these things.

**Richard Hill**

And there's a certain, you can see a certain 'creep' in the files. You will have a report that says, 'Mr. Smith associates with pacifists, and he might be a member of the New Zealand Peace Council, which we think is a front'. And then the next report done on him a few months later, we'll say 'he's very close to the NZ Peace Council'. And then another one will say 'he's a member of the Peace Council'. And another one will say, 'well, therefore he is a dangerous communist'. You see this. And the reports from informants are often graded in terms of their reliability in the eyes of the handler. But that might not be remotely valid, the information and its assessment. And so you tend to get people ending up as quite dangerous to the security of the state, when actually they're not at all. It's just people who move in what even the security services called progressive circles. Even they even the security police use this terminology,

**Audience member**

How do you mitigate the risks that are associated from biased handlers, from institutional, the police itself, biases?

**Richard Hill**

That's one thing we want to talk to more former operatives about, because it's a very good point. You know, hopefully, they're improving their skill sets, as time goes by, we don't see a great deal of evidence for that for some period, some of our period.

**Steven Loveridge**

As Richard mentioned in the post 1956 period, it became standard to grade intelligence, with reliability of information and likeliness of what they were providing. I can't remember the scale of the top of my head, but you know, there's a grade for each of those categories and some in files we've seen, they've been given to us, you know, basically 'informant not reliable, what they're saying is probably not true'. In which case, you might wonder why this intelligence is going on the report, but the mentality seems to be collect all the information, we can analyze it later on and decide what adds up.

**Brigitte Bonisch-Brednich**

If they were all men - how did they surveil women, and especially when maybe information was exchanged in a women's loo or in the dormitories?

**Richard Hill**

In "the paradise that was New Zealand", to use Jamie Belich's depictions, or the way it was depicted - women weren't dangerous. They did what they were told that, the dishes and stuff and then one or two came along, and they were completely puzzled, completely puzzled by Elsie Locke, for example. And indeed, they even make comments about Elsie to the effect that 'ah, she goes out a lot and leaves the child with someone else' or 'or she lived with a man who was much older than her'. And so they're finding reasons for her dangerousness. Yeah, and it is really quite extraordinary. But yeah, there were one or two women employed as informants during the Second World War onwards. And but they were just really completely peripheral to spying on things. So as one, for example, who working for the security intelligence bureau in signal war, who would go out and behave coquettishly towards guards at military installations and then they would let her in. And then they'd be in deep trouble because she had exposed gaps in security. But the women themselves..

**Malcolm McKinnon**

And when they're when you think cases like the Lakes and Costellos, sometimes the security service seemed to think the woman was the *more* untrustworthy and unreliable of the couple so you almost got the reverse.

**Audience member**

But equally some of the intelligence from some organisations used that unconscious bias - the IRA used apparently 200 women to support an IRA agent in the field for a year. And that's quite a lot of people but because women can move around, pushing prams, visiting grandparents, aunties and uncles that I mean they were invisible.

**Steven Loveridge**

Yeah, the KGB employed a granny squad as well.

**Richard Hill**

There aren't many files, personal files on women. How many would they be? What proportion would we have before 1956? Not many.

**Malcolm McKinnon**

So before we close, can you let us in on any secrets about the next book? Or is it secret?

**Richard Hill**

Well, it's quite interesting, because when the police do surveillance, they have a purpose. They want to arrest someone, eventually, if they're doing wrong, and that includes political crimes, like sedition. Whereas when the SIS take over they've got no powers of arrest. So they're merely compiling files. And then occasionally, they'll say to the police, look, we think you should arrest this person, but hardly ever happens. And it tends to go wrong when it does. So this vast pile of files keeps building and building and building and anyone who's seen their own file will know that, you know, they can tell you when you went to a musical evening in 1953, or who you ate lunch with a couple of weeks ago – well a couple of decades ago.

**Brigitte Bonisch-Brednich**

Someone would like to know when the book is going to be out.

**Richard Hill**

At the launch I asked people not to ask us that.

**Steven Loveridge**

Totally 'need to know basis'.

**Richard Hill**

ASAP but we are hoping to get draft soon.

**Audience member**

Ah, that's not what I asked. I asked which date you'd go up to ie in the coverage of the [second] book.

**Steven Loveridge**

I'll tie that with the previous question. The pitch for the next book would be that every now and then, as a historian, you get these great 'cut off moments' that make such a clean break. And 1956 is a pivotal year in the subject. It's the year the SIS was formed. The security service. It's the year New Zealand became a full member of UKUSA what's more commonly known as Five Eyes today. Suez spells pretty much the end of the British Empire so good a date as any. The Hungarian Revolution changes, really revolutionizes the communist world and puts schisms in play that are going to completely shake things up. There's a few other it's amazing how many things tied to that period. But suddenly, you're looking at a new world emerging out of this and that book will go from 1956 these new things being put in motion to 2000/2001 which brings us closer to the present day.

**Richard Hill**

After that, you can't get all that much information.

**Malcolm McKinnon**

Yeah, one final question.

**Audience member**

So have you guys seen your own files and if so how do you have access to that? Because I'm curious to see mine after a couple were released now I want to have [a look] if it's possible for me to access it

**Richard Hill**

We never ever talk to anybody about whose files have been produced or not. But I can tell you afterwards how to ask for your own and it's really easy. Yeah. And I urge everyone to try it because you do find out really interesting things and your memories are jogged for all kinds of things that you've done.

**Malcolm McKinnon**

Or the humiliation of discovering you don't have one!

**Richard Hill**

Yeah that happened to a relative of mine - they were furious.

**Malcolm McKinnon**

I think on that note, we may close and thank Richard and Steven for putting a tremendous session.