

changing roles of women in nineteenth-century Auckland, both Maori and Pakeha, and the rise of the working classes. Originally forming branches of British trade unions, and then in 1876 forming the first Auckland Trades Council, by the early twentieth century the workers of Auckland were industrially and politically at the forefront of the New Zealand labour movement. Of course, there is room for these to be covered elsewhere.

Stone concludes with a brief overview of some twentieth- and twenty-first-century infrastructure issues still facing Auckland, which have antecedents in the nineteenth century. Access to drinking water, sewage disposal and transport links around an ever-expanding city are particular examples.

In Stone's view, Auckland was and is a city of immigrants whose cultural roots lie elsewhere, and is in great danger of becoming what he calls a 'community without memory'. It is his recovery of that memory of Auckland's continued rapid growth, its commercial and entrepreneurial nature, and its uniqueness in comparison with the rest of New Zealand that continues to motivate this pre-eminent historian of nineteenth-century Auckland. Stone painstakingly follows up on information and details, tries to use as wide a range of source material as possible, seeks others' opinions, is generous with his time and assistance, and continually tests accepted views against the realities of the facts presented. Where someone else has in Stone's opinion produced the definitive account, he acknowledges it, and guides the reader to it. His material is always approachable by a wide range of readers, and passes the ultimate test of a public-orientated historian in that his book chapters are readily able to be published as newspaper articles.

Philip Hart, when reviewing *From Tamaki-makau-rau to Auckland* in this journal in 2002, said Stone had 'succeeded superbly in an elegantly written and well-illustrated book'. There is nothing to disappoint in this book either.

DAVID VERRAN

*Auckland City Libraries*

*The Plot to Subvert Wartime New Zealand*. By Hugh Price. Victoria University Press, Wellington, 2006. 160 pp. NZ price: \$29.95. ISBN 0-86473-538-6.

THIS ENTERTAINING BOOK combines elements of both a History Channel documentary and an airport thriller. Indeed, this reviewer devoured most of it whilst marooned in a Wellington departure lounge. It is also testimony to the degree of human frailty that gripped otherwise sane individuals, not least Bob Semple and Peter Fraser, during the dark days of early 1942 when an Axis invasion of New Zealand was a very real prospect.

On 28 March 1942 Syd Ross, a petty criminal with a penchant for theft and dishonesty, was released from Waikeria Prison. He immediately took a train to Wellington and contacted Semple, the Minister of Public Works. After revealing his criminal credentials Ross told Semple that while waiting at the Te Awamutu railway station he had been approached by a man who asked whether he would be willing to help bring the war to a swift conclusion by joining a group of Nazi agents and sympathizers, based in the Bay of Plenty area, who intended a series of bombings and assassinations as precursor to a full German invasion. Suitably alarmed, Semple contacted the Prime Minister, Peter Fraser, who immediately informed Major Kenneth Folkes — recently arrived from England to head New Zealand's fledgling Security Intelligence Bureau (SIB).

Perhaps Semple and Fraser could be excused their gullibility on the grounds that recent arrests of Australia First fascists raised the possibility that the enemy was now very close to home. But the subsequent success of Ross's audacious con owed less to his subtle criminal nerve-tapping and much more to the machinations of Folkes — a man who would surely have been entirely comfortable among the deeply flawed cast of

Norman Dixon's *On the Psychology of Military Incompetence*. Determined to justify his existence, expand his powers and inject much-needed MI5-trained starch into Wellington's amateurish corridors of administration, or simply maybe to give the SIB a less mundane diet than mail checking and low-level monitoring of generally harmless enemy aliens, Folkes played the spectre of a Nazi fifth column to the hilt. Within days the SIB repackaged Ross as Captain Calder of the merchant marine and gave him cash, a fast car and a suite at the Grand Hotel in Rotorua. For the next three months, amid leisurely jaunts around the countryside and visits to his mother and criminal associates in Auckland, he drip-fed information about an ever-expanding Nazi network. Meanwhile Folkes began urging Fraser to adopt Section 18b of the Defence of Britain Act which would give the SIB power to arrest, interrogate and detain anyone without recourse to judicial process. But as further testimony to his own deluded grandeur, he neglected to share any of the 'intelligence' emanating from 'Captain Calder' with the Chiefs of Staff who were presumably expected to coordinate repulsion of the invaders.

The police, a body condemned by Folkes as incompetent dullards, were already several steps ahead of him. From his frequent appearances in the *Police Gazette*, 'Calder' was soon recognized as Ross by a Rotorua constable who passed the matter directly to Commissioner James Cummings in Wellington. Ross duly confessed his hoax and was perhaps as amazed as anyone at the web of intrigue that had grown around his taxpayer-funded thermal wonderland holiday. It surely says much that he was never charged. Instead he soon returned to more familiar haunts with a sentence for cheque fraud and dishonesty in 1943, then died of tuberculosis in November 1946. After damning reports from Cummings, Attorney-General Rex Mason, the Chiefs of Staff and an exposé by *Truth*, Folkes was duly dismissed by Fraser, who now declared him to be a 'grave misfit'. He left New Zealand in 1943 to resume his career as a carpet exporter. In a final irony, the work of the severely compromised SIB passed to the police.

This bizarre tale is reinforced with various entertaining digressions and speculations — not least being the author's own account of spending afternoons of his teenage war years surreptitiously listening to the shortwave service of Radio Berlin. The humorous but brutal dissection of the staff of the SIB by the communist *People's Voice* is one for performance reviewers to savour as well as highlighting the lack of anonymity of New Zealand's minute wartime bureaucracy. Equally one can have fun pondering, but probably never resolving, the speculation about actual Axis incursions into New Zealand. Did a U-boat crew really land at Napier in 1945 to acquire fresh milk from an Allied cow or did they merely linger off shore watching the apparently bustling night life of the town?

This is a short book that would not have suffered from further brevity. Price has a tendency to slightly breathless over-explanation and repetition which would have created dramatic tension had too much of the plot not been revealed early on. In style this is reminiscent of a genre of US History Channel documentaries governed by the need to retain the attention of channel-surfing viewers through a maze of commercial breaks. The text also becomes rather a pastiche of original documents, many of which would have been better represented by selected quotations underpinned by condensed analysis. While one can perhaps understand the decision to eschew footnotes on the grounds that the only extant collection of papers on the Ross hoax has now been deposited in the Beaglehole Room of the Victoria University library, the text does sometimes become cluttered with bibliographical detail of various documents and secondary sources. Although a fascinating, frequently amusing and sometimes disturbing account, nothing in the almost Pythonesque antics of Ross and those who took his bait is likely to trigger a revisionist rush on New Zealand's military or security history, but it will make a first-rate comedy-drama if the rumoured film version comes to fruition.