

Operation What?

A broadside against the keeping
of the national secrets.

NYT Book Review 4/2/97 p. 19

SECRETS

The CIA's War at Home.

By Angus Mackenzie.

Illustrated. 241 pp. Berkeley:
University of California Press.
\$27.50.

By Tim Weiner

TWO years ago, I met an F.B.I. agent with whom I shared an interest in certain Central Intelligence Agency shenanigans. He shook hands, smiled and said: "I feel like I know you. I've done three leak investigations on you." Angus Mackenzie might have appreciated the moment. He was a man obsessed by the Government's legal and illegal attempts to control information.

Mackenzie was the long-haired great-grandson of the magazine publisher S. S. McClure, who gave the great muckrakers Ida Tarbell and Lincoln Steffens their platform at the start of this century. In 1970, when Mackenzie was 19, he was arrested for selling issues of an underground newspaper he had founded, called *The People's Dreadnaught*. From this formative experience onward, he was like a man who pulls a loose strand from a thick sweater and keeps pulling until he has unraveled half a mile of wool.

He spent the rest of his life as a freelance muckraker, gathering information on Government secrecy and striving to finish this book. Left in draft form at his death from brain cancer three years ago, completed by his friends and family, "Secrets" is Mackenzie's legacy: a book obsessed. Like the man, it

is an unruly piece of work, but it grabs you by the lapels and holds on.

Throughout the cold war — and after — the White House asserted that the President has a right to control and classify information as he sees fit. Mackenzie argues that such sovereign powers are for kings, not freely elected leaders.

"Secrets" begins with the C.I.A.'s assault on *Ramparts* magazine in 1966, after that leftist journal disclosed some of the

Tim Weiner is a correspondent in the Washington bureau of *The New York Times* and a co-author of "Betrayal: The Story of Aldrich Ames, an American Spy."

agency's secret campus programs. The C.I.A., barred by its charter from spying on Americans, quickly began sending the White House reports on the editors and writers of *Ramparts*.

This exercise in extralegal snooping grew into a much larger effort: prying into the unruly world of the underground press. And that grew into Operation Mhchaos, the biggest domestic spying caper in the C.I.A.'s history, aimed in essence against Vietnam War protesters. The exposure of Mhchaos during and after Watergate remains a low point in the agency's history.

Chastened but determined, the agency started going after books — for example, censoring large swatches of "The CIA and the Cult of Intelligence," by Victor Marchetti, a former C.I.A. officer, and John Marks. (This, of course, guaranteed the

book's commercial success.) Then the agency refined its tactics, winning in court the right to enforce secrecy contracts with its employees.

In the 1980's, as Mackenzie explains, the Reagan Administration expanded this into a grand strategy to impose secrecy restrictions on all Government workers, on the principle that Presidents, not the people, own the information that the Government generates.

Since Mackenzie's death, the Clinton Administration has let some light into the enormous secrecy bureaucracy, but it also wants secrets kept where it sees fit. It saw nothing wrong with the C.I.A.'s destroying the career of a State Department official who blew the whistle on the agency's malfeasance in Guatemala. The White House has placed the National Security Council's records beyond the reach of the Freedom of Information Act. And F.B.I. agents are still conducting scores of leak investigations on reporters and their sources.

More than a quarter-century ago, around the time that Mackenzie was arrested for peddling *The People's Dreadnaught*, Justice Hugo L. Black of the Supreme Court wrote in the *Pentagon Papers* case: "The guarding of military and diplomatic secrets at the expense of informed representative government provides no real security for our Republic." That, simply stated, is what Angus Mackenzie is trying to say in this good old-fashioned broadside. □