



Undercover police and policing

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Police chiefs were aware six years ago that undercover unit 'had lost moral compass'

- SDS was regarded as out of control force within a force
- Intelligence 'hoovered up' on campaigning families

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The Scotland Yard undercover unit that gathered intelligence on 18 grieving families was known by police chiefs six years ago to have been so out of control it had "lost [its] moral compass" and become a "force within a force".

The claims from a source closely involved in discussions on winding up the Special Demonstration Squad (SDS) in 2008 came as a report for the [Metropolitan police](#) revealed intelligence was gathered across three decades on family campaigns challenging the Metropolitan police. In several cases the families' struggles exposed the force as failing and telling untruths.

The scale of the intelligence gathering led figures in politics and former Met officers to warn the revelations would damage community confidence. One former police chief said it was a "seismic blow", with people fearing the intelligence had been gathered to smear critics.

The report by Derbyshire's chief constable, Mick Creedon, carried out for the Met, said the justice campaigns had not been the targets of police infiltration.

The intelligence was "hoovered up" accidentally by officers ordered to infiltrate leftist groups, which police chiefs believed were capable of violence.

Creedon's report said the intelligence on the grieving families and their campaigns was "collateral", although he criticised its retention when it served no purpose in fighting crime.

He declined to name those affected, the "majority" of whom were black, but the Guardian has established they include:

- The **Harry Stanley** campaign, set up after a man carrying a table leg was gunned down by officers who mistook it for a shotgun.
- **Wayne Douglas**, whose death in police custody led to riots in Brixton.
- **Michael Menson**, burned to death by a racist attacker who almost escaped justice because police said Menson had doused himself in petrol and set himself alight.

The files of intelligence gathered by the SDS also include names relating to the campaign of Jean Charles de Menezes, **shot repeatedly in the head after being mistaken for a suicide bomber**. Information was also recorded on the relatives of **Cherry Groce**, whose shooting by police in 1985 sparked the Brixton riots; Stephen Lawrence, who was murdered by racists in 1993; and **Ricky Reel, who died in 1997 after a clash with racists**.

It is unlikely any past or serving officer will face action. Creedon told The Guardian: "I don't think anyone sees this as a misconduct issue."

The SDS is praised by police chiefs for vital undercover work that stopped serious crimes and violence. But it has been hit by a series of revelations about its officers sleeping with female campaigners, fathering children and using dead children's identities.

The Met declines to say why the SDS was shut down when some of its activities were hailed as being so crucial. A senior source with close knowledge of the secret discussions that led to the closure in 2008 told the Guardian that concerns about the unit surfaced in the Met in 2006, leading to a review being ordered.

The source said: "It was worse than out of control. It was actually a force within a force, operating to set of standards and ethics more suited to guerrilla warfare than modern policing.

"Quite simply, they lost their moral compass and as a result nothing was out of bounds. A quite shocking vacuum of any supervision and leadership allowed this to happen. "

Creedon's report criticised poor supervision and said managers were responsible for the retention of intelligence which failed to comply with the law.

Operation Herne, Creedon's investigation into undercover policing, is to continue its investigations and more embarrassment for the Met is expected.

Publication of the report led to warnings of a further collapse in confidence in the police, especially in black communities where it is at its lowest.

Leroy Logan, a former Met superintendent, said: "It has a seismic impact on community confidence, chipping away at the remnants of people's loyalty to the organisation, internally and externally."

Logan, who retired last year and is a former chair of the Metropolitan Black **Police** Association (Met BPA), said people would suspect the intelligence was held to smear those challenging the Met: "When someone poses a risk or threat to the organisation, they try and dig the dirt."

He also dismissed Creedon's finding that the 18 instances were accidental, saying the report by another chief constable into the Met was: "Like getting someone to mark their own homework."

"For this to be said to be an accident is total balderdash."

Stafford Scott, a community activist in Tottenham, north **London**, said: "There can be no trust between the black community and the Met. Even when we are victims they treat us as criminals."

The Leicester MP Keith Vaz, chair of the home affairs committee, said: "Confidence in all communities will be shaken. There will be bewilderment and bafflement as to what they [the Met] were doing."

Janet Hills, chair of the Met BPA, said: "This has a severe impact on community confidence. Why are we not naming and shaming these supervisors? The community want to see accountability."

Ethnic-minority confidence in the police is an issue of concern for home secretary **Theresa May**, who in a speech in May, said that "only 42% of black people from a Caribbean background trust the police. That is simply not sustainable."

Creedon painted a picture of an "isolated and insular" undercover unit that operated in complete secrecy, and branded the management of the undercover officers "complacent and possibly negligent".

He said: "I cannot justify the way this information was subsequently handled. Quite simply put, unless the information could have prevented crime or disorder, it should not have been retained and certainly not for the period it has been.

"I can understand why this is likely to be distressing and astonishing for those families and friends who campaigned, often for years, for justice; to know that details

of your deceased or innocent family member and your campaign was mentioned in reports stored - often stored for years - in special branch records. This must seem inexplicable."

Marin Hewitt, a Met assistant commissioner, said: "The fundamental point that the ... report makes clear is they have found no evidence that any family or justice campaign was infiltrated by the SDS.

"This was information that those officers picked up whilst deployed into groups that had been assessed by the Met as being violent, or capable of violence and disorder."

The SDS is facing a series of investigations into its conduct, including the public inquiry ordered by the home secretary. Creedon's internal police inquiry is expected to last at least another year. Other inquiries are being carried out by the police watchdog, the Independent Police Complaints Commission, and the QC Mark Ellison.

Peter Francis, the former undercover officer who blew the whistle, called on the Met to give the grieving families all the secret files on them so they could judge for themselves why they were spied on.

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