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NEWS 29 June 2023

Public Inquiry Chair says senior Metropolitan Police Officers or Home Office officials should have closed down

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This morning, the Undercover Policing Inquiry's Tranche 1 Interim

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Report has been published on the Inquiry's website.

The Inquiry was set up in 2015 after revelations of numerous abhorrent practices within two undercover policing units, the Special Demonstration Squad (SDS) and the National Public Order Intelligence Unit (NPOIU).

The Interim Report covers the Inquiry's investigations of SDS officers and managers between 1968 and 1982. It is intended to set out the history of the unit, and to draw conclusions about the purposes for which it was set up and continued, and their justification.

The SDS was established in July 1968 with two principal purposes: 'gathering intelligence which would assist uniformed police handling events at which there was risk of public disorder; and gathering intelligence about numerous individuals and the groups to which many belonged' ([report page 89, paragraph 1](#)). In his 110-page report, Sir John Mitting, the Chair of the Public Inquiry, found that the operation of the SDS was flawed in both respects.

In relation to the management of public disorder, the report found that the contribution of the SDS was minimal. For instance, the report notes ([report page 70, paragraph 66](#)) that the SDS failed to give any warning about the Brixton riots 'because the groups infiltrated by undercover officers were not responsible for causing it'. Time and again the report refers to the deployment of officers into groups that posed no threat to public order or the state. The Chair is clear that the SDS had no

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justification for infiltrating the organisations and groups it did.

‘The long-term infiltration of political or single-issue groups by a unit of a police force could readily have been justified if its purpose was to prevent or investigate serious crime, including terrorism and activities akin to it. In the era of the Cold War and the “Troubles”, applying the standards of the time, the infiltration of groups which in fact threatened the safety or well-being of the state could also have been justified... the great majority of the deployments by the SDS in this period did not satisfy either criterion’ ([report page 95, paragraph 27](#))

The report is also highly critical of the evidence gathered on individuals and groups.

‘... a remarkable quantity of reports have survived concerning the political activities of groups with no bearing on the threat, if any, which they posed to public order, and on the identity, personal lives and views of individuals....an unknown proportion of them have been kept until the present day.’ ([report page 92, paragraph 10](#))

The Chair found that ‘this intrusion into the lives of many hundreds of people in this era required cogent justification before it should have been contemplated as a police tactic’ but there was none.



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The report concludes that senior officers within the MPS and Home Office officials during this period should have addressed the operation of the SDS in relation to:

1. The intrusion into people's personal and political lives (which included sexual relationships)
2. The entry into people's homes by deception
3. The taking of positions of responsibility within infiltrated groups, which would often involve them handling confidential information protected by law or helping to organise both lawful and unlawful political activity
4. The using of dead children's identities to create undercover identities

It also concludes that if these issues had been addressed, or if they have been publicly known at the time then 'the SDS would have been brought to a rapid end'.

The Chair's conclusion that the entire SDS enterprise lacked legitimacy or justification, even by the standards of 50 years ago, will be a hammer blow to the already beleaguered Metropolitan Police Service.

The Chair in the forward states that the report is part of a work in progress and that some issues are better addressed when all the evidence about them is in. The Core Participants anticipate therefore that harder and more specific condemnation about practices and culture of these police spy units will have to be faced by the Metropolitan Police and government in future reports.

'Lindsey' a woman targeted for an abusive relationship said:



The Inquiry interim report is a huge moment for us. For the Chair to conclude that the spying operations had so little justification that they should have been shut down 50 years ago is significant, and so damaging for the Metropolitan Police and the politicians who continued to fund the unit over decades.

Of course there is also a feeling of anger and regret – the Chair's conclusion highlights that the women whose lives have been upturned by discovering they had been in relationships with these officers, should never have met these men. The officers should never have been deployed. They should never have been there to abuse women as they did and intrude so heavily on the lives of all of those campaigners. We will continue to state our case to the Inquiry that we need to see our files!

Tom Fowler, a political activist who was spied on in the South Wales Anarchists, comments:



It is welcome that the Chair has concluded that the SDS should have been shutdown shortly after its inception. This report does not however directly address many of the malpractices such as abusive sexual relationships, spying on Justice campaigns, stealing deceased children's identities, blacklisting of trade unionists and incitement and perjury despite the fact that it was the revelation of these practices that caused the inquiry to be set up. The abusive tactics of the SDS got worse over time, so I would expect them to be the central focus of future reports, particularly as they no doubt fed into the policing culture that has resulted in the contemporary crisis in the Metropolitan Police.

Jules Carey, solicitor to Core Participants and partner at Bindmans LLP, said:



Our clients and all the non-state core-participants have been vindicated by the Chair's conclusion that the SDS should have ceased to exist shortly after it was formed. This was the essence of their closing submissions, and it follows that none of the abhorrent practices of the policing unit; that have overshadowed so many lives

and caused so much pain; can be justified in law or at all. It is anticipated that the chair will be compelled to tackle the particular malpractices in the next report as they come even more sharply into focus.

Frank Bennett, a relative to a deceased child whose identity was appropriated by an officer, comments:

“

I welcome the Chair's conclusion that the SDS should have been shut down, and that one of the reasons for this was the officers using the identities of deceased children to make cover identities. It is clear that the police thought that their immoral practice of stealing the identities of deceased children was justified because we the families would never find out. It is good that the chair challenges this. It's disappointing however that the chair was not able to identify who was responsible for starting this practice or why it became routine when it was so central to how the SDS operated.

25 Core Participants are represented by Jules Carey, Joseph Morgan, Khariya Ali and Jennifer Carlin of Bindmans LLP, instructing Fiona Murphy KC and Shanthi Sivakumaran of Doughty Street Chambers, Kirsten Heaven and Owen Greenhall at Garden Court Chambers, and Matthew Ryder KC at Matrix Chambers.

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