

Spycops Inquiry – a response to the Interim Report

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UNDERCOVER POLICING INQUIRY

Undercover Policing Inquiry Tranche 1 Interim Report

Tranche 1: Special Demonstration Squad officers and managers and those affected by deployments (1968–1982)

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HC 1539

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An Interim Report – ‘[Undercover Policing Inquiry – Tranche 1 Interim Report](#)’ has been released by the

[Undercover Policing Inquiry \(UCPI\)](#). The report covers the period 1968-1982 and investigates the establishment of the Special Demonstration Squad (SDS) and its operations during this period.

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On 12th March 2015 the then Home Secretary, Theresa May announced the establishment of a [statutory public inquiry](#) to examine undercover policing. Whilst the UCPI potentially can include all undercover policing in England and Wales since 1968, in reality it will concentrate its efforts on the SDS, the National Public Order Intelligence Unit (NPOIU) and some regional police forces. Unfortunately, and despite efforts by our client [Tilly Gifford in bringing Judicial Review proceedings](#) we could not convince the Scottish High Court that the Inquiry should be extended to Scotland.

For a public inquiry to be granted is attributed to the [courageous women](#) who were misled into engaging in sexual relationships with undercover officers. Their unwavering dedication to seek justice compelled the Government, to grant a public inquiry. Furthermore, the [Stephen Lawrence Family Campaign](#) exerted additional pressure after uncovering that an undercover officer had been deployed to spy on them.

Public Order and Subversion

When defending the operations of this undercover unit two major arguments have been put forward to defend the SDS. First, that the SDS provided detailed and necessary information to prevent public disorder. Second, that the SDS provided necessary and detailed information to prevent ‘subversion’ – that is groups and individuals who the Government claimed wanted to overthrow the state.

This Interim Report rejects both of these arguments.

First, the Interim Report states clearly that the deployments of undercover officer (UCO’s) made little

contribution to the policing of public order. Indeed only small minority of the reports (for example, about 8% between 1975 and 1978) dealt with anything that could possibly be said to be public order related. On the occasions that they did relate to public order, the assistance given was minimal (see particularly comments related to the events at Southall but also Lewisham).

The Interim Report also states that if assistance was required it could have been achieved by other means. Ultimately the Interim Report concludes that “...the ends did not justify the means.” (p.96)

Second, the issue of ‘subversion.’ The Interim Report concludes that virtually no groups presented a threat to the safety or well-being of the State (i.e. was subversive). The Chair’s view was that only three of the many hundred of groups that were infiltrated could be said to have met those criteria (Provisional Sinn Fein and two groups that were referred to in closed hearings that have not been publicly named). It follows that NONE of the Non-State, Non-Police Core Participants met the criteria.

‘Political Policing’

In Tranche 1 our clients Richard Chessum and Lindsey German gave live in person evidence to the Inquiry. Both of them were activists and campaigners during the 1970’s. Both were monitored, and had extensive files opened on them. This was not justified. We are concerned that in Richard Chessum’s case this lead to blacklisting.

We argued on behalf of our clients that at the highest levels of the Metropolitan Police (MPS), Home Office, as well as the Security Services, were fully aware of illegal and unethical practices by 1975 at the latest. They knew that public order and subversion justification was tenuous at best.

In respect of the taking of the highest possible positions of responsibility, we note that the Security Services and Senior Metropolitan Police officers were aware that UCO's (for instance Rick Clark) would engage in [activity that would inevitably de-stabilise organisations](#).

Bearing in mind that state of knowledge, a key question going forward for the UCPI must be: **Why did the highest levels of the MPS, Home Office and Security Services not address these issues?**

Further, given that the Interim Report accepts that there was, 1) no public order justification and 2) no subversion, then what the Inquiry must answer going forward is – **Why did the methods and practices of the SDS continue through this period, and indeed going forward from 1982?**

Our clients believe that the only answer is there was a decision at the highest levels that surveillance, monitoring and infiltration by UCO's of socialists, anti-racists, and social justice campaigners was for political and ideological reasons. We will continue to argue that political policing was the long term strategy of the state for the purposes of blacklisting, and to create a data base of files on individuals and groups. There can be no other reasons!

Conclusion

We welcome some of the conclusions of the Interim Report. We believe that the UCPI is heading in the right direction.

There are of course weaknesses. The Interim Report criticises two UCO's who engaged in the most dishonest sexual exploitation. However, overall the institutionalised racism, sexism and anti-working class sentiment of the SDS was not criticised, and indeed the SDS managers were praised as they "...performed their duties conscientiously and in the belief that what

they were doing was lawful and in the interests of the public. A handful of them undertook tasks which required great skill and courage...” We have to dispute this. The level of surveillance, the amount of personal information contained in reports, the intimate relationships forged by UCO’s and the lives ruined by the impact of vetting and blacklisting does not deserve praise.

The Interim Report fails to address the issue of the effects of blacklisting. Additionally it fails to comment on the monitoring of trade unionists and trade unions. We hope that in the next part of the Inquiry these issues will be addressed.

As stated above there does need to be an examination of and the reasons for the continuation of the SDS beyond 1982.

We argue, on behalf of our clients that that reason for its continuation for another 30 years was because the SDS acted for the security services, and Government and carried on with a project of **‘political policing.’**

As we stated in the conclusion in our last submission to the UCPI, “ In their defence, the British establishment claimed to be defending democracy, but it was not a defence of democracy, it was the undermining of democracy in defence of the establishment”

Whilst the Interim Report is a step in the right direction – the jury is still out. We hope that once further disclosure is examined, and live evidence is given by those affected by undercover policing, the UCPI will draw the conclusion it was **political policing** for ideological reasons.

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