



## Undercover police and policing

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# Undercover policing inquiry: victims launch legal action

Victims seek to overturn home secretary's refusal to appoint diverse panel to sit with retired judge amid fears of whitewash

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Victims of undercover police officers have started legal action against the home secretary over the troubled public inquiry into the conduct of police spies.

They say they have initiated the legal challenge in an attempt to prevent the public inquiry becoming a whitewash.

There has been sustained criticism of the inquiry that has been given the task of examining how undercover police infiltrated political groups since 1968.

It is chaired by a retired judge, Sir John Mitting, who has been accused of being naive and old-fashioned. A barrister for the victims of the undercover police has branded him “the usual white, [upper middle-class, elderly gentleman whose life experiences are a million miles away from those](#) who were spied upon”.

Three victims of the police spies, with the support of others, are seeking to overturn Sajid Javid's refusal so far to appoint a panel to sit with Mitting.

They say a diverse panel with an expert understanding of racism, sexism and class discrimination would be a more effective way of uncovering the truth.

One of them is [a woman who has described how an undercover officer, Andy Coles, groomed and manipulated her](#) into an intimate sexual relationship. This has been denied by Coles.

The woman, known as “Jessica”, said : “One of the central tasks of the inquiry must be to assess whether there has been institutional racism and institutional sexism in the context of undercover policing. The chair sitting alone does not have our confidence or public confidence on these vitally important issues that go to the heart of the inquiry.”

They are [appealing for donations from](#) the public to fund their legal challenge through a [crowdfunding website, Crowdfunder](#).

Mitting intends to set up a panel for the final third of the inquiry, when it is formulating recommendations for the future of undercover policing, but not for the first two-thirds, when it is examining the conduct of the police spies and their superiors. He has argued that a panel for the whole inquiry would [be “a heavy cost in both time and money”](#).

The inquiry was set up in 2014 by the then home secretary, Theresa May, following revelations that [police had planted “a spy in the camp” of the parents of murdered teenager Stephen Lawrence](#).

The inquiry is also due to scrutinise [how undercover police deceived women into intimate sexual relationships](#), gathered [information on black justice](#) campaigns, and stole [the identities of dead children](#).

It was due to conclude this year but has yet to hold any substantive hearings in public and [will now end in 2023 at the earliest](#).

The delay has been caused by the police who have attempted to keep secret the identities of [many of their undercover officers who were sent to spy on political groups](#).

The victims have accused Mitting of allowing too much of the inquiry to be held in private, ignoring their desire to hold the police to account in public.

The trio mounting the legal challenge have been made core participants by the inquiry.

Also taking legal action is John Burke-Monerville [whose son, Trevor, was held in 1987 at a police station](#) during which, it was alleged, he was beaten and suffered brain damage. A campaign to hold police to account was set up.

His father became [part of the inquiry after he was shown a photograph of a police spy whom](#) he recalls attending the justice campaign meetings.

The third person is [Patricia Armani da Silva, the cousin of Jean Charles de Menezes](#) who was shot dead by police in 2005. Police have admitted that [police covertly collected information on the](#) campaign to get justice for him.

In recent weeks, the inquiry has disclosed that among the groups infiltrated by the undercover officers were the [Greenham Common women's peace camp](#) and local campaigns in Hackney, east London, to expose police misconduct and oppose the granting of more powers to the police.

The Home Office has been contacted for comment.

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