

British student arrested under Official Secrets Act

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A student was arrested and held for seven hours on March 6 under the Official Secrets Act. It is believed she was targeted because of suspected connections to former MI5 officer David Shayler, who is currently in exile in France after making revelations about alleged illegal activities on the part of the British secret services.

Special Branch officers arrested Julie Ann Davies, a 36-year-old student at Kingston University in Surrey. They had with them a warrant requiring the university to provide access to her computer. Davies was not told the reasons for her arrest and no charges were laid, but her release was subject to police bail. Her solicitor, Neil O'May, said Davies was "very uncertain about what the allegations are and what she's done to be of interest to the Special Branch."

Davies is reported to have been active in the campaign to get charges of breaching the Official Secrets Act dropped against Shayler, whom she met while doing research work for Channel Four television's *Mark Thomas Product*. The programme, a combination of political satire and investigative journalism, ran a half-hour feature on Shayler at the beginning of the year.

In a statement published on his web site on March 8, Shayler condemned Davies' arrest. "Over the last few months she has offered her support for the campaign group, Public Friend No. 1. This is a democratic campaign designed to work not only for my return to the UK without prosecution, but also for greater openness and accountability for MI5 and MI6. It is ironic that she has been arrested for alleged breaches of the draconian Official Secrets Act after joining a campaign which was set up to reform that very act."

Upon leaving MI5, Shayler published articles in the *Mail on Sunday* that were an embarrassment to the

Labour government, which claimed they were damaging to the security services. Shayler was then forced to flee to Paris to avoid prosecution under the Official Secrets Act.

The former agent claimed he had been "instructed to carry out operations against tiny organisations and harmless individuals who posed no conceivable threat to national security". Amongst these he listed National Union of Mineworkers President Arthur Scargill and Labour Party members Peter Mandelson (now Northern Ireland Secretary), Jack Straw (now Home Secretary) and Harriet Harman (former Social Security Secretary).

Among Shayler's revelations is his allegation that MI6 officers plotted to assassinate Libyan leader Colonel Gaddafi and that MI5 had a high-level mole known by the code name "deep throat" within the British Workers Revolutionary Party.

John Wadham, the director of the civil rights group Liberty and also Shayler's lawyer, told the BBC that he knew Davies, and that "I'm a bit surprised that we have Special Branch going around arresting those people involved in producing satire and comedy."

"The programme went out at the beginning of this year, and was a half-hour discussion of David Shayler in a light-hearted and jokey fashion. The arrest and prosecution of more people will do nothing to protect national security."

The arrest of Julie Ann Davies is the latest in a string of measures taken by MI5 and MI6 in an attempt to isolate Shayler and suppress his revelations. The *Guardian* newspaper reported March 8 that it had been served notice by the police "that they intend to apply to the courts for an order to require the newspaper to hand over the original of a published letter from Shayler last month."

A comment in the *Guardian* by Richard Norton-

Taylor says, "Other newspapers—there can scarcely be any which Shayler has not communicated with—have had similar approaches from the special branch."

The same article draws attention to Shayler's allegation that the security services bugged an interview between IRA suspect Michael O'Brien and his lawyer Gareth Peirce at Belmarsh prison in 1992. Taylor comments, "I can disclose that this is not an isolated case. The security services also admit bugging a conversation between other defendants and lawyers at Belmarsh. The *Guardian* cannot yet reveal the names of those involved because of a contempt order imposed by the courts."



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