

British police stole IDs of dead children to infiltrate political organisations

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A report into police spying operations in Britain has conceded that at least 42 identities were stolen by the secretive Special Demonstrations Squad (SDS) and its successor organisation, the National Public Order Intelligence Unit (NPIOU), between 1968 and 2008. According to the interim Operation Herne report written by Derbyshire Chief Constable Mick Creedon, the practice was used to infiltrate political and campaigning organisations.

Creedon's report is a damage limitation exercise, rushed out before the end of the parliamentary term in response specifically to allegations of widespread identity theft from dead children by the SDS/NPIOU. Creedon claimed that the practice had been abandoned and that "the tactic has a very historical perspective."

Creedon admitted that over the SDS/NPIOU period of operation, 106 identities were either stolen or concocted entirely.

In fact, the report and a host of recent exposures makes clear that, while identity theft might be a risky and completely illegal practice, infiltration using bogus identities against political targets is very much ongoing.

Operation Herne was launched in 2011 following a succession of revelations that police spies had sexual relations with people in their target organisations and had fathered children. It was also alleged that police gave evidence in court under their false names. To date the investigation has amassed 6,000 paper and 50,000 electronic records. Creedon's report runs to a mere 23 pages.

Widespread identity theft came to light following a complaint made by Barbara Shaw, the mother of Rod Richardson, who died two days after his birth, January 5, 1973. Only one Rod Richardson was born in 1973. Shaw's lawyer told the *Guardian* February 6 this year of their suspicions that a police officer had used the same name to infiltrate political groups.

Guardian article explained that a man bearing the same name posed as an anti-capitalist protester and was involved in anarchist groups between 2000 and 2003. Indymedia suggested that "Richardson" operated in London and Nottingham, was involved in a communal house, attended an anarchist meeting to protest against the monarchy and was "arrested" with a van full of equipment prior to a stunt by the anarchist "Wombles" group. In 2002 activists for Mayday 2002 became alarmed at his behaviour.

He also flitted around anti-fascist demonstrations, a climate camp and hunt saboteur groups. In Europe he was involved in protests against the G8 between 2001 and 2003. He disappeared in 2003, and has never been heard of since. Indymedia published photographs, unlike the *Guardian*, which acceded to police requests not to do so.

The suggestion is that "Richardson" was replaced in this milieu by former police agent Mark Kennedy. In 2011 Kennedy offered to testify in defence of six environmental campaigners regarding his activities as "Mark Stone" between 2004 and 2009. A separate investigation into "Richardson", Operation Riverwood, is underway by the Independent Police Complaints Commission (IPCC).

Further, and hugely damaging, revelations emerged in June, following the *Guardian*'s exposure of efforts by the Metropolitan Police Service (MPS) to use SDS undercover agent Peter Francis to collect information on the family of murdered London teenager Stephen Lawrence. Lawrence was killed by racist thugs in 1993. The campaign by Lawrence's family to expose the corrupt and racist police response resulted in the McPherson report, which conceded "institutionalised racism" in the MPS.

Francis, who has written a book to expose police spying, told the *Guardian* that while he never met the Lawrence family, he was asked as "Pete Black" to pass

on “hearsay” gleaned from his undercover role in various “black justice” organisations. Francis said he had argued, while still a serving police officer, that the SDS should “come clean” on its role to the McPherson report, lest they face “battling on the streets” when the truth came out.

Francis’s revelations, which led to a meeting between Stephen Lawrence’s mother Doreen and Theresa May, the current home secretary, were backed up by Creedon in comments to the Home Affairs Select Committee in July. Creedon told the committee he had found documents on “covert deployments which reported intelligence which relate” to the Lawrence family. Francis also infiltrated the Youth Rights Europe group, which is led by the Socialist Party (former Militant tendency) and a justice campaign for Brian Douglas, killed in 1995 by a police baton.

It also emerged in June that two undercover spies, Bob Lambert and John Dines, successfully infiltrated the London Greenpeace environmental group during the 1990s. The June 21 *Guardian* reported that Lambert even co-authored the leaflet used to sue London Greenpeace members Dave Morrison and Helen Steel in the so-called McLibel case.

According to a recent book, *Undercover—The true story of Britain’s secret police* by Rob Evans and Paul Lewis, these placements were part of numerous undercover activities by police in various “left” or protest organisations, ranging from animal rights groups to the Socialist Workers Party.

Creedon shed some light on the SDS/NPIOU activities and the means through which false identities were constructed. The Special Operations Squad was formed in 1968, under the Labour government of Harold Wilson, by the Metropolitan Police Special Branch specifically to infiltrate the anti-war movements of the period. The unit was quickly expanded and in 1972 was renamed the Special Demonstrations Squad (SDS). Throughout its existence, until 2008, the unit was intended to be entirely secretive and committed to “long-term covert deployments”, which it quickly concluded “provide the best intelligence yields.”

Creedon quoted a former SDS chief inspector who explained that “new recruits were instructed on how to go about obtaining false birth certificates. They would obtain details of a deceased person of a similar age from Somerset House [former General Register Office] and then use those details to go about creating their legend.” The technique was popularised in 1971 in the Frederick Forsyth novel “The Day of the Jackal.”

Deceased identities were considered essential in heading off research by activists concerned that they might have a spy in their midst. In an era before digital records, a birth certificate also allowed the acquisition of Social Security, a passport, a driving licence, and similar records necessary to support a fake identity. Creedon commented that the SDS was also “highly wary” of Department of Social Security and General Register Office staff “with activist sympathies”.

Creedon also found a 2002 series of memoranda regarding an operation between the National Criminal Intelligence Service and the passport office, which identified 1,200 names where a dead person had apparently applied for a passport. He noted: “It would be a mistake to assume that the use of identities of dead children was solely within the SDS and the NPIOU.”

ID theft was and is entirely illegal. Creedon reported advice from the Crown Prosecution Service that the practice might involve offences under forgery and counterfeiting, deception, perjury, misconduct in a public office, ID and road traffic laws.

The report, of course, upheld the practice of covert policing against “violent protest groups”—the catch-all term for all who attract SDS/NPIOU attention. Creedon insisted that while ID theft may now have been discontinued, “other practices were in place to ensure that viable fictional profiles could be created without using deceased children’s details.” Later he reiterated “protocols are now in place for the creation of identities and documentation”.

Another recent *Guardian* article, on June 25, reported that records are maintained by the MPS-led National Domestic Extremism Unit on 8,913 individuals. From across the “political spectrum”, every one of these individuals can consider the organisations of which they are members as likely targets of direct infiltration, close Internet surveillance and the use of paid informants.



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