

Documents confirm US military spying on antiwar groups

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Newly released documents confirm that the US Army was the prime mover of the surveillance and infiltration of antiwar groups on the West Coast. The documents shed light on the circumstances surrounding a protracted lawsuit against federal government spying on antiwar activists.

The lawsuit, *Panagacos v. Towery*, was filed in 2010 by Julianne Panagacos and six other antiwar activists against a government spy, John Towery, who infiltrated at least four different organizations in the Puget Sound, Washington area: Port Militarization Resistance, Students for a Democratic Society, the Industrial Workers of the World, and Iraq Veterans Against the War.

Towery was identified in 2009 as the man who, under the pseudonym John Jacob, became active in all these groups. He supplied information to the Washington State Fusion Center, which links federal state and local police agencies, including the FBI, the Department of Homeland Security, and Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE).

Until now, however, Towery had always denied that he was acting at the behest of the US military, even though he was a member of the Force Protection Service at Joint Base Lewis-McChord, a huge military base in Tacoma, Washington. Domestic spying by the armed forces is illegal under the Posse Comitatus law and has been officially banned—while continuing in secret—since the exposure of Pentagon spying on the 1960s movement against the Vietnam War.

The new documents came to light as the result of a Public Records Act request in a separate case, involving a member of Port Militarization Resistance who was framed up on charges of assaulting a policeman during an antiwar march.

One of the newly released documents is a 2007 email

from Towery, using his military account, to the FBI and police departments in Everett and Spokane, Washington, Portland and Eugene, Oregon, and Los Angeles. He proposes that they form a cross-agency group for intelligence sharing on “leftist/anarchist” activists.

Larry Hildes, the National Lawyers Guild attorney who filed the lawsuit, said in a press statement issued February 24, “The latest revelations show how the Army not only engaged in illegal spying on political dissidents, it led the charge and tried to expand the counterintelligence network targeting leftists and anarchists. By targeting activists without probable cause, based on their ideology and the perceived political threat they represent, the Army clearly broke the law and must be held accountable.”

Towery attended a Domestic Terrorism Conference in 2007 at which “domestic terrorist” dossiers on antiwar and left-wing activists were distributed for police review. These individuals could later be targeted for state repression ranging from preventing them from boarding airplanes (if they were placed on the federal “no-fly” list) to preventive detention in the event of a mass roundup of supposed “terrorists.”

In addition to Towery, other named defendants include his supervisor Thomas Rudd, the US Army, Navy and Coast Guard, military officers in each of these services, and dozens of local police departments and individual officers in Washington state.

The Obama administration has sought to have the Panagacos lawsuit dismissed, as well as demanding that all documents in the case be sealed. In December 2012, the Ninth Circuit Court of Appeals ruled that the allegations of government violations of the First and Fourth Amendments to the US Constitution were “plausible,” and the case is now in the discovery phase,

with trial scheduled for June 2014.

The administration’s official posture is that Towery was not working for the Army when he infiltrated the antiwar groups, but working “off-hours” for the Pierce County Sheriff’s Department. However, the email was sent from his desk at Lewis-McChord during business hours, using his military email address and identifying himself by military rank.

Attorney Hildes and one of the seven plaintiffs in the *Panagacos* suit, Glenn Crespo, were interviewed Tuesday on Democracy Now. Crespo described how Towery had sought to entrap him by persuading him to buy guns and learn how to shoot.

After seeming to befriend Crespo while attending antiwar meetings, Towery at one point visited him at home and showed him a gun and how to load and unload it. Later, he showed Crespo documents about military tactics and suggested making use of them in “our actions.” Subsequently, he gave Crespo a copy of a proposed article written from the perspective of the 9/11 hijackers. Fortunately, Crespo’s reaction to these approaches—which he described as “the weirdest thing in the world”—was to keep his distance.

“The Army was expressly paying him to monitor, disrupt and destroy these folks’ activism and their lives,” Hildes said. “People would get busted over and over and over. Towery was attending their personal parties, their birthday parties, their going-away parties, and taking these vicious notes and passing them on about how to undermine these folks, how to undermine their activities, how to destroy their lives.”



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