

UK undercover police escape prosecution for abusing women

Julie Hyland
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Undercover police officers who formed sexual relationships with female members of organisations they were targeting will not face charges, the Crown Prosecution Service (CPS) announced last week.

More than 10 women are taking legal action against the Metropolitan Police (Met), after finding out that their former partners were part of an undercover police unit—the Special Demonstration Squad (SDS)—spying on them and other activists. The SDS was connected to the secret intelligence service, MI5. For 40 years, beginning in 1968, it gathered information on left- and right-wing political parties and campaign groups. It was only closed down in 2008 after it was revealed that the identities of 80 dead children had been stolen to provide its operatives with cover stories.

A number of the SDS operatives went “deep cover” for years, even fathering children with unsuspecting activists.

In its announcement last Thursday, the CPS said it had considered whether the women were tricked into the relationships and “whether there is sufficient evidence to allow charges of rape, indecent assault, procuring a woman to have sexual intercourse by false pretences, misconduct in public office and breaches of the Official Secrets Act.”

It had concluded that “there is insufficient evidence for a realistic prospect of conviction for any offences against any of the officers.”

The fact that the women were unaware that their partners were police officers was not relevant under the Sexual Offences Act, the CPS said. There was “insufficient evidence” to show that the SDS officers had knowingly abused their position in order to form the relationships. This meant misconduct could not be proven.

The CPS decision is absurd on its face. None of the

women involved knew that their partners were part of an intelligence gathering operation. The relationships that the SDS operatives formed would have been critical in providing them with the cover they needed to continue their spying.

In opposing the lawsuit, the Met had initially refused to confirm the identities of some of its undercover officers, claiming that it could “neither confirm nor deny” (NCND) their role. This, the Met claimed, was necessary to protect their officers and their undercover operations.

This was rejected by a high court judge in July, forcing the Met to confirm the identities of two SDS operatives, Jim Boyling and Bob Lambert.

Boyling posed as an environmental activist for five years, between 1995 and 2000, under the false name of Jim Sutton. He had relations with at least three women during that time, one of whom he later married and fathered two children with. They were divorced in 2008.

Lambert infiltrated animal rights and environmental groups between 1984 and 1988, under the name Bob Robinson, fathering a son with one campaigner and having relations with others.

Mr Justice Bean ruled that both men had already been publicly identified as undercover officers and that the Met’s resort to NCND was “simply unsustainable.” However, he ruled that the Met did not have to confirm or deny two other undercover officers, known as John Dines and Mark Jenner.

The Met denies that Lambert and Boyling were authorised to form the relations or that “intimate and sexual relationships were started as a deliberate tactic” to spy on activists. It claims that the SDS operatives began the relationships “because of mutual attraction and genuine personal feelings.”

Belinda Harvey, who unwittingly had a relationship with Lambert, rejected the claims: “How can a relationship be genuine when it is based on a massive web of lies? He pretended to be a man with noble ideals and political commitments, when in reality he was a police officer spying on our friendship network.

“He pretended he was committed to the future when he always knew he would go back to his real job and wife and kids. That doesn’t show genuine feelings; it is abuse and I would never have consented to such a relationship had I known.”

The women have described their experiences as being “raped by the state.”

Revelations over the activities of the SDS had led to an ongoing investigation, Operation Herne. The CPS decision confirms that what is actually underway is a cover-up of state spying.

It was confirmed only in July that the SDS had illegally gathered information on families fighting police inaction or collusion in the killings of their loved ones. Former SDS operative Peter Francis had revealed last year that the unit had spied on the family of Stephen Lawrence, murdered in a racist attack in 1993. The aim was to smear the family, who had led a long campaign to expose police inaction and corruption in the failure to prosecute their son’s killers.

The Lawrence campaign was just one of 18 justice campaigns for murder victims and those who had died following contact with the police. They include the Justice for Jean Charles de Menezes, the young Brazilian electrician executed by plainclothes police on the London Underground on July 22, 2005, and the family of Cherry Groce, whose shooting by police in 1985 led to the Brixton riots.

SDS recruit Mark Jenner, who went under the identity “Mark Cassidy”, infiltrated the Colin Roach Centre in the 1990s. Roach was a 21-year-old black man who died in police custody in 1983. “Cassidy” formed a four-year relationship with a woman unaware of his undercover activities and fathered a child with her. She is one of the women involved in the lawsuit against the Met.

In total, hundreds of groups and campaigns were targeted over the four decades of the SDS’s existence. Not only did they spend years posing as activists and gathering information, but they also organised provocations against the groups they were undercover

in. Among those known to be targeted are the Socialist Party of England and Wales’ predecessor organisation, the Militant group, and its youth organisation, Youth Against Racism in Europe (YRE), in the mid-1990s.



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