

Over 1,000 organisations targeted by UK police undercover spying operations

Steve James
3 August 2017

The official Pitchford inquiry into undercover policing in England and Wales has confirmed that police spies using fake identities have targeted more than 1,000 organisations.

The figure covers a period of 50 years, with no details of the organisations involved or the duration and scope of the operations against them. It makes clear that no organisation or party in Britain expressing oppositional sentiment will have avoided the undemocratic machinations of the political police.

The number was finally made public months after 133 targeted people designated as “core participants” in the inquiry demanded “a list of names of all the organisations about whom intelligence was gathered; the cover names (not the real identities) of the individual officers responsible for infiltrating and reporting on activists and campaigns; and the individual Special Branch reports for each Core Participant group or individual.”

None of the other information requested has been released, nor has the scale of the information gathered been explained.

The organisations named in the inquiry’s current list of 205 core participants include the Advisory Service for Squatters, Blacklist Support Group, Broadwater Farm Defence Campaign, Defend the Right to Protest, Fire Brigades Union, Hackney Community Defence Association, McLibel Support Campaign, National Union of Mineworkers, Newham Monitoring Project, Union of Construction Allied Trades and Technicians, Youth Against Racism in Europe along with a number of anarchist and animal rights groups.

Individuals named include members of these organisations, family members and supporters of numerous targeted protests and justice campaigns. The list includes a number of current and former Labour

MPs, and the parents, Doreen and Neville, of murdered South London teenager, Stephen Lawrence. Another core participant is Myrna Simpson, mother of Joy Gardner, a 40-year-old Jamaican mother killed in 1993 during a police deportation raid.

These organisations and individuals are core participants because whistleblowers named them as having been targeted by police spies. Not a single police officer or additional targeted organisation or person has been publicly identified by the Pitchford inquiry or its internal police predecessor, Operation Herne.

The inquiry was set up as damage limitation on behalf of the British state in 2015 by then Home Secretary, Theresa May, into undercover operations by the Special Demonstrations Squad (SDS), which operated between 1968 and 2008, and its contemporary and successor, the National Public Order Intelligence Unit (NPOIU). Inquiry Chair Sir Christopher Pitchford has recently been replaced as head of the inquiry because of illness. His replacement is Sir John Mitting, currently vice chair of the Investigatory Powers Tribunal, tasked with complaints against Britain’s intelligence agencies. At the current rate of progress the inquiry does not even expect to begin public hearings of evidence until 2019. Meanwhile, there have been reports of documentation being destroyed.

The extent of police undercover operations first emerged in 2011, following the collapse of a court case at which former police constable Mark Kennedy was due to give evidence. Kennedy, using the undercover name Mark Stone, had been one of the organisers of a 2009 environmental protest around Ratcliffe-on-Soar power station that resulted in mass arrests.

Subsequent investigations by journalists, campaigners and targets of police spying revealed Kennedy as

operating across Europe in and around numerous environmental and related protests. In 2005, for example, in preparation for a protest against the G8 meeting of world leaders, Kennedy volunteered, and was trusted, to organise vehicles, tents and portable toilets for a protest event near Gleneagles, Scotland. Some 350 peaceful demonstrators were eventually rounded up and arrested.

Kennedy was only the first of what is now said to be at least 144 police agents using fake IDs, many stolen from dead children, in their work for the SDS, the NPIOU or related police bodies operating in England and Wales. Some used their bogus identities to form relationships with members of their target organisations in what were effectively actions of state-sanctioned rape, even fathering children. Of these, only 16 have so far been publicly identified, although a few more are anonymously listed as core participants. The vast majority remain unidentified and are not involved in the inquiry at all.

Those identified, according to Undercover Research Group's web site are: Andy Coles alias Andy "Van" Davey, Peter Francis aliases Peter Daley or Pete Black, Mark Kennedy alias Mark Stone, Lynn Watson (real name not known), Marco Jacobs (real name not known), Jim Boyling alias Jim Sutton, Simon Wellings (real name not known), Robert Lambert alias Bob Robinson, John Dines alias John Barker, Mark Jenner alias Mark Cassidy, Carlo Neri (real name not known), "RC" (real name not known) Gary R. & Abigail L. (real names not known), Rod Richardson (real name not known), Mike Chitty alias Mike Blake, Matt Rayner (real name not known), Jason Bishop (real name not known), N81 (inquiry number) and Roger Pearce.

Some were involved in multiple operations. Robert Lambert stole the ID of a deceased seven-year-old, spied on the London Greenpeace group, oversaw spying on the family of Stephen Lawrence, and planted incendiary devices as part of provocations against animal rights groups. Later, as an SDS manager, he oversaw information gathering on Labour Party MPs Diane Abbott, the late Bernie Grant and now party leader Jeremy Corbyn.

Andy Coles, until recently deputy police commissioner in Cambridgeshire, resigned following his accidental exposure in his brother Richard's 2014

autobiography. Coles is currently facing legal action by an unnamed woman, "Jessica," for his activities between 1991 and 1995 when, as Andy Davey, he posed as a removal driver and animal rights activist. "Jessica" told the *Guardian* she was seduced by Coles into a relationship that lasted over a year. Coles is a Conservative councillor.

Individuals subject to police spying in Scotland have demanded an independent inquiry into similar operations in Scotland. The Pitchford/Mitting damage limitation inquiry is not even investigating abuses carried out in Scotland despite many of the known police spies, including Mark Kennedy, having operated there. One of those targeted was environmental campaigner Tilly Gifford, the subject of repeated and sinister threats as part of an attempt by still unidentified officers to recruit her as an informer within the Plane Stupid protest group.

The Scottish government has authorised an internal police inquiry into undercover operations by HM Inspectorate of Constabulary in Scotland (HMICS). One of the HMICS review team is Stephen Whitelock, formerly chief of a covert police unit, while the current head of Police Scotland, Phil Gormley, had oversight of both the SDS and NPIOU at key points in their operations.

In 2015, the Socialist Equality Party published an Open Letter to the Pitchford inquiry demanding "the immediate release of the names of all undercover police operatives, especially those active in the Workers Revolutionary Party (and its forerunners and successor organisations), their pseudonyms and dates of operation."



To contact the WSWS and the Socialist Equality Party visit:

wsws.org/contact