

UK's "spycops" inquiry continues coverup of Stephen Lawrence murder

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The UK's Undercover Police Inquiry (UCPI) is continuing the cover-up surrounding the racist murder of 19-year-old Stephen Lawrence in Eltham, London on April 22, 1993.

The UCPI is formally investigating the use of at least 139 undercover police officers, "spycops", to infiltrate, monitor and disrupt more than a thousand political groups over the course of four decades.

Last month, the first Inquiry hearings into the activities of the secret Special Demonstration Squad (SDS), including spying on the Lawrence family, took place online—six years after the inquiry's creation and two years after it was supposed to end.

Over three weeks, opening statements were made by individuals or lawyers representing "state core participants" (various police organisations and the Home Office) and "non-state core participants" (political parties, trade unions, justice groups and environmental campaigners) which had been subject to police infiltration and provocations.

The delay has been caused by the police and intelligence services seeking to get the proceedings held in secret, "neither confirming nor denying" the existence of spycops and controlling the release, redaction or destruction of documents.

The SDS was first formed as the Special Operations Squad in 1968 under the Labour government of Harold Wilson to spy on the anti-war movement. Massively expanded in 1972, at a time of rising working-class militancy against the Conservative government, it was renamed the SDS and infiltrated hundreds of left-wing and progressive organisations at the behest of the Security Service (MI5).

Officers built their cover stories using the names of dead children, formed long-term relationships with and even fathered children to unsuspecting women before disappearing without warning.

The UCPI was only authorised by former Home Secretary Theresa May in 2014 because of the tenacious investigations by activists, deceived women and a handful of journalists. Several high-profile court cases resulted, forcing the Metropolitan Police Service (MPS) to admit abuses of

human rights and pay millions in compensation. At the same time, it was revealed that an SDS officer who had wormed his way into the Lawrence family's campaign was reporting back to MI5 on all its activities.

May told the House of Commons, "Only a public inquiry will be able to get to the full truth behind the matters of huge concern" contained in a 2012-2014 review conducted by Mark Ellison QC into the handling of Lawrence's case. The review included allegations of corruption surrounding "the initial, deeply flawed, investigation" of Lawrence's murder and suggestions that the MPS withheld evidence from the 1998 Macpherson Inquiry into the Lawrence case and racism in the police service.

May said at the time, "Stephen Lawrence was murdered more than 20 years ago and it is deplorable that his family have had to wait so many years for the truth to emerge. For the sake of Doreen Lawrence, Neville Lawrence, their family and the British public, we must act now to redress these wrongs."

Nearly seven years later, speaking on behalf of Doreen Lawrence (now Baroness Lawrence), lawyer Imran Khan QC told UCPI chairman Sir John Mitting last month, "Sir, Baroness Lawrence is losing confidence, if she has not already lost it, in this Inquiry's ability to get to the truth. The truth as to why she, her family and supporters were spied upon by the police. This Inquiry is not delivering on what she was promised and is not achieving what she expected. To say that Baroness Lawrence is disappointed is to understate her position.

"Baroness Lawrence is also disappointed by the approach of the Metropolitan Police Service in its Opening Statement with its suggestion that there has been 'widespread and lasting change' in the police. The reality is that there has been very little change. What change there has been was forced upon the MPS. It has never welcomed it or embraced it."

Khan pointed out that "not a single police officer was disciplined or sacked, rather they were promoted in their careers or are now enjoying their retirement; and many of

those that spied upon Baroness Lawrence and her family have, to date, evaded proper scrutiny.”

Khan explained how SDS officer turned whistle-blower Peter Francis revealed, in 2013, how he and three other undercover officers were told by their SDS commanding officers to sabotage a campaign for a "better investigation" campaign into Stephen Lawrence's murder, by digging up "dirt" and "disinformation" and feeding back intelligence.

Khan noted that, in 2014, MPS Commissioner Sir Bernard Hogan-Howe had promised to be “transparent and honest in our duty of disclosure.” However, Doreen Lawrence “is still waiting to receive material which might throw more light on the allegations made by Peter Francis and has seen or heard nothing in relation to the involvement of [undercover officers codenamed] N81, N78 and N86. Baroness Lawrence considers it an utter disgrace that over 6 years after the Commissioner of Police made those commitments, she is none the wiser as to why she and her family and supporters were spied upon...”

“Baroness Lawrence is exhausted by the number of times that she has been given reassurances and promises. Each appears to have been as hollow as the next and some appear downright hypocritical.”

Khan concluded, “What Baroness Lawrence believes is actually happening is a ‘secret’ inquiry in which officer after officer is hiding behind a pseudonym and a screen. Not only does she not know who most of them are, but neither does the public... It appears to her that this Inquiry is more interested in protecting the alleged perpetrators than the victims.”

Similar outrage was shown by other non-state core participants. Heather Williams QC, the lawyer representing Neville Lawrence, declared, “It is now more than 6 and a half years since the Home Secretary’s announcement of this Public Inquiry. To date, the Inquiry has revealed virtually nothing to the public about the ‘profoundly shocking’ issues she had identified. Dr [Neville] Lawrence has received nothing substantive from the Inquiry about undercover policing in his case.”

Phillippa Kaufmann QC, representing 21 women deceived into relationships, criticised the MPS for claiming that these relationships resulted from “a lack of supervision” and the spycops for the “frankly obscene” way they spoke about the women.

Kaufmann concluded, “The women continue to participate in the Inquiry, but the hope they had at the outset that here they will finally be given the answers they need has diminished to the point of vanishing.”

The experiences of the Inquiry's non-state core participants confirms the UCPI's essential role as a damage limitation exercise to clean up the fall-out from the earlier spycops

court cases. It is as far as it is possible to be from the independent investigation of anti-democratic measures against political organisations and individuals it was purported to be.

From the beginning the Socialist Equality Party rejected the Inquiry’s terms of reference, which excluded many political organisations from being designated as core participants. This, we said, was “especially peculiar, given that the focus of the inquiry is the Special Demonstration Squad (SDS), which was specifically created as part of high-level political operations against the left.”

Based on evidence from ex-MI5 agents and others, the SEP demanded “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.”

The state’s refusal exposed the true character of the Inquiry. The UCPI is a fraud which serves only to torment the victims of undercover police operatives and screen the further development of police-state structures by the most right-wing government in British history, with the support of the Labour Party.

During the UCPI's seven years of existence, Boris Johnson’s government has introduced a raft of new repressive legislation in line with the move of the ruling elite internationally to dispense with democratic forms of rule. Last month, in a calculated rebuff to the UCPI, Johnson rushed through the House of Commons the Covert Human Intelligence Sources (CHIS) Bill giving immunity from prosecution to state agents who commit crimes, including murder, torture or sexual violence, while undercover. Only a small number of Labour MPs opposed the bill.



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