**Sylvia Pankhurst Memorial Lecture 2025** given by “Lindsey” from Police Spies Out Of Lives

Huge thanks to the Memorial Committee for inviting me to speak.

I belong to Police Spies Out Of Lives, an organisation that campaigns to end the sexual abuse of women activists and members of the public by undercover police officers, who formed intimate relationships and even fathered children in their cover identities. The road that led us to this point has been a long one, but there’s only time to signpost some significant moments along the way.

So, in 2010 an environmental activist ‘Lisa’ found a passport belonging to her partner of six years, Mark Stone, while they were on holiday in the remote Dolomites. The passport had his picture, but a different name – Mark Kennedy. This sparked suspicions and investigations by Lisa and activists who had known Kennedy for the seven years he had been around, and extremely active within, environmental campaigns in the UK and across Europe.

Their extensive research led to the discovery of birth certificates for Kennedy’s children, with father’s occupation listed as ‘police officer’. They confronted Kennedy and he confessed to being a police spy, tasked against environmental activists by the Met police Special Branch. Significantly he claimed he was not the only one.

Jump back a few years and other women activists in different movements had worked out that their vanished ex-partners had been state actors. They were disbelieved, seen as delusional, “He’s just left you love – don’t make a big thing out of it” was the sort of response they met with in most of those they chose to confide in.

When the story of Kennedy’s infiltration hit the news the women twigged that they had also been subject to this abuse. To cut a long story VERY short, they joined forces to take the first, landmark, legal case against the Metropolitan police Commissioner and the National Police Chiefs Council for assault and misfeasance in public office.

More officers began to be uncovered by activists, researchers and journalists as patterns of tactical behaviour began to emerge. However much the Met claimed these were ‘rogue’ officers the evidence said differently.

In 2011 an ex-undercover officer Peter Francis, who had spied on socialist and anti-racist activists, went to the Guardian with revelations that he had been tasked against the family of Stephen Lawrence – not just to report on the family justice campaign, but to collect information that could discredit the campaign. Francis is the only ex-officer who has had the courage to whistle-blow and the backlash for him has been severe.

With these media reports and more reports of the sexual deception of activists swirling around, Theresa May had no choice but to call a public inquiry into undercover policing (UCPI). It is confined to England and Wales, and has many limitations, but it is the only vehicle we currently have for obtaining information about spying on political activity. Some useful and intriguing material has come out of the UCPI – now in its tenth year.

We have discovered that in 1968 following the huge anti-Vietnam war demonstration in London, where the police realised they were unable to control such a large crowd and horrible police violence ensued, an undercover unit of Metropolitan police officers was conceived, to infiltrate and report on activism in the capital. The Special Demonstration Squad (SDS) was born, and ran until 2008, deploying up to a dozen officers at any one time to embed themselves within campaign groups for roughly five years per deployment. They were well paid and had enormous expense budgets. In 1999 a second unit launched – the National Public Order Intelligence Unit (NPOIU). This unit operated in the regions and was similarly well resourced. The longest NPOIU deployment we know of is seven years (Kennedy).

There were around 170 officers – most deployed, but some back-office – over a near-50 year period. The stated aim was to collect ‘intelligence’ to assist uniformed policing of public order. Almost as soon as the SDS began it started to collect masses of detailed information on any groups and individuals deemed ‘subversive’. The information was typed into reports that were sent to Special Branch and Security Service filing systems. MI5 even directed some of the tasking of the officers and targetting decisions made by SDS management. Over 1,000 groups were spied upon – almost exclusively on the left-wing of the political spectrum. ‘Intelligence’ reports show that the officers didn’t see fascists as a public order issue!

The abuses committed by SDS and NPOIU officers are many – the unofficial SDS motto being ‘By any means necessary’:

• There are over 50 miscarriages of justice as a result of these deployments.

• They spied on at least 18 family justice campaigns – often families who had lost loved ones to police violence.

• There was reporting on Members of Parliament – all Labour MPs.

• Information collected by officers was passed to the illegal construction industry blacklist, which was used to bar workers considered troublesome (for expressing health and safety concerns or political views) from work for decades, with catastrophic financial effects.

• Officers trawled death registers and stole the identities of children who had died as their cover ‘legends’.

• We now know of over 60 women who were sexually abused by undercover officers deceiving them into relationships.

Undercover political policing is only a small part of undercover policing. We are now finding cases of the abuse of women in the sphere of undercover policing of crime – which forms the vast majority of undercover operations. If the same undercover tactics have been used in policing of crime then the numbers of women abused will rise exponentially. The trouble is we are unlikely to ever find out about these highly secret operations.

In 2023 the case of ‘Mary’ was reported in the *Guardian*. Mary’s case was in the Avon and Somerset Constabulary area. She had a 19 year long relationship and a child with a man who she considered her life partner. He was in fact undercover, spying on criminals in the area Mary happened to live in and he was using her to aid his cover. She didn’t even know his real name.

Throughout centuries we have seen spying and violence from the state towards progressive movements for change. We always knew there would be some kind of surveillance of left-wing activism, but many of us had no idea of the scale of the intrusion. As one of our lawyers said during Inquiry hearings “this is the British Stasi”.

Police Spies Out Of Lives is campaigning for amendments to the 2021 Covert Human Intelligence Sources (CHIS) (Criminal Conduct) Act. This enshrines in law everything we have been campaigning against as it allows for any conduct by CHIS to be authorised, even the most serious crimes in our society – murder, rape and torture. Other countries have legislated to prevent this type of conduct by CHIS. Not the UK.

We will continue to campaign for it to be illegal for undercover operatives to have sex with members of the public. We have a petition calling for this, which is open until mid-November. You can sign it here <https://petition.parliament.uk/petitions/721401>

Please sign and share this petition and follow our campaign and the Inquiry proceedings. Only if there is public interest we get something akin to justice.

To end on a note of positivity – there are many of us who would never have worked together in the past, because of different political approaches and aims. But that is the root of our strength as groups campaigning around the issue of spycops. We are contributing to the undercover Policing Inquiry hearings and closely documenting proceedings for future use and we are a pretty formidable force!

<https://policespiesoutoflives.org.uk/>