

**Request pursuant to Rule 9 of the Inquiries Act 2005 for a witness statement
from John Rees to the Undercover Policing Inquiry.**

1st Witness Statement of John Rees

2nd March 2022

This statement is provided to the Undercover Policing Inquiry (UCPI) further to the Rule 9 request.

Personal Details

Please give your full name and date of birth.

1. John William Rees, 30th July 1957.

Political Activism

Please provide a background of how you became involved in the the International Socialists (“IS”), later renamed the Socialist Workers Party (“SWP”). Please outline your political activities which led to your membership of IS and explain how you became a member of IS.

2. When I was still at school, I took economics at A Level and I became interested in political and economic questions. I was involved in setting up the School Council in my sixth form and I was reading a variety of political material.
3. I then went to study politics, at what was then called Portsmouth Polytechnic. I guess that was one of the reasons I became politically active was because, at that time, there was a Lecturer on the Economics strand of my degree called Peter Griffiths. He had previously stood as Conservative Party candidate in a West Midlands by-election in the early 1960's. It was an infamous by-election which had unseated Labour's Foreign Secretary Patrick Gordon Walker. It is significant because Griffiths ran the election on the slogan, and I quote 'If you want a n***** for a neighbour vote Labour.'
4. The idea of being taught by this out and out racist appalled me and many other students. So along with students on my course, and involving the Students Union, members of the International Socialists (forerunner of the Socialist Workers Party) and Labour students we organised a boycott of his lectures on the basis that we didn't think that he was an appropriate person to be teaching what was a multi-racial class.
5. In the course of that, members of the International Socialists supported us, as did the entire student body. I became involved with and eventually joined the National Organisation of International Socialist Society and, then the Socialist Workers Party. The party had changed its name around that time from the International Socialists.

6. I ran for President for the Student Union later the following year. I was involved in the Anti-Nazi League when it was set up around this time, and with Rock Against Racism.

7. As I said above I joined the Socialist Workers Party in about January 1977 – from recollection. I was involved with the Portsmouth branch of the party and also politically active in the students union. I was involved in the life of the Portsmouth branch, organising meetings, selling ‘Socialist Worker’ and also politically active on behalf of the National Organisation of International Socialist Society our student branch.

8. I left Portsmouth Polytechnic in 1978 and moved to Hull. I attended the University of Hull and began a Master of Philosophy course studying Marx and Hegel. I was involved with the Socialist Workers Party at Hull University I was one of the leaders of a student occupation at the University against the increase of overseas student’s tuition fees. I recall that I even had a Court Order taken out against me that banned me from the Administration Building at University of Hull. The campaign attracted the support of the student body – maybe upwards of 2,000 students – and resulted in a victory, the establishment of a hardship fund for overseas students who couldn’t afford the fees.

9. I also involved myself in the life of the Hull branch of the Socialist Workers Party. I was particularly involved in the anti-racist and anti-fascist campaigns during my time living in Hull. It is important to remember that Yorkshire was a particular strong base for the National Front and the fascists. Meetings that we held in

Hull were repeatedly attacked by the fascists in force. They would bring coaches over from Leeds. They were very professional. They dressed in black shirts and physically attacked the meetings, and I was involved in the broad anti-fascist work to build campaigns against them.

10. We had to physically defend our meetings at times. The most effective was we had a Tony Cliff to speak in Hull. Tony Cliff was of course Jewish, and he was a particular target for the fascist because he was both a revolutionary socialist and a Jew. A combination which they particularly dislike. I recall that the meeting came under attack, as I say, that was the time when Fascists were bused in from Leeds. However, prior to this particular meeting we had contacted the dockers in Hull. At the event it was successfully defended because the dockers, their wives and family members came down and formed a cordon at the door of the hall and prevented the fascists from attacking the meeting.

11. But we were not always so successful. There was another occasion, a smaller meeting, where I was the speaker. That meeting was held in an upstairs pub room in the old part of Hull. This was which was attacked by fascists – most probably associated with the National Front. They ran up the stairs, and we had to hold the table that I was speaking from against the door of the room to stop them getting in. My girlfriend at the time had to get out the window and jump one flight down to escape.

12. The National Front also attacked the socialist bookshop that we had in Hull on more than one occasion.

13. While I was at Hull University, I was elected to the National Union of Students National Executive and I served on that body from 1980 to 1981 I seem to recall.

Intelligence Reports

Please consider the intelligence reports which the Inquiry has obtained and include in your witness bundle, all of which contain a reference to your name. Are the details that have been recorded accurate? If not please identify any inaccurate reports and set out the respects in which the report is inaccurate.

General Context

14. Some of these documents are so badly reproduced that they are unreadable. Of the ones that are readable I can't see any inaccuracies or remember the events to which they refer to with sufficient clarity to say that they are inaccurate. They seem like the most minimal mentions of my activities, I couldn't say with any detail whether they are accurate or not. I see from one of them that it refers to a Special Branch file. Which I didn't know I had, so, which I would very much like to see.

Grunwick industrial dispute.

The Grunwick Strike took place between 1976 – 1978. Did you attend the pickets at any time during this period?

15. Yes. I attended the mass pickets on at least two occasions, possibly three times.

Did you witness any disorder or violence if so please describe it?

16. The Police were deploying considerable force. I was there on the day the Miners joined the picket line. The Police were there in numbers, as I say a considerable force in order, it appeared, to keep other supporters of the strike back on to the pavements and away from the road. The main objective of the police was to ensure scabs were bussed into the factory. It was a very narrow road and the Police were pushing people back on to the narrow pavements and off the road. So, people were obviously getting crushed because there were obviously a lot of people there. As a result, the crowds there, supporting the industrial dispute, started to push back. But I don't recall anybody throwing punches or throwing things at the police. From my perspective it was mainly pushing and shoving.

Did you or others you were with participate in any violence or disorder?

17. No. I was there to show solidarity with the pickets, and so were members of the Socialist Workers Party.

Was violence or disorder at the Grunwick site sanctioned by the SWP?

18.No. The policies of the Socialist Workers Party were to build confidence in working class struggle. We did this through solidarity which would mean, attending picket lines to support industrial struggle, and raising financial support for those workers on strike through our own trade unions, or through street collections.

Lewisham

Did you attend the demonstration later named the Battle of Lewisham on the 13 August 1977?

19.Yes.

What role did you play in preparations for the day and where on the scene were you during the course of the day? Can you describe the events that you witnessed? Did you witness any violence or disorder?

20. I was still a student at Portsmouth at that time. This was during the summer break, so I was actually living back at my parents' home in Chippenham in Wiltshire. I came up on my own that day, I would have heard about the demonstration through anti-racist networks.

21. So, I came up by train to Paddington, made my way across London on my own to Lewisham, a part of London I'd never been to before. I was very unsure about the geography of where the demonstration was due to start. This was the first national political demonstration that I had ever been on. So, I made my way

up to I think the assembly point for the morning demonstration, which was the one organised by the Campaign Against Racism and Fascism (CARF) I think. It was definitely supported by the Communist Party. By the time I reached the assembly for this rally, it was already more or less over. So, I made my way down through Lewisham Way to what became the main demonstration.

22. So, as you come down Lewisham Way I was at a junction where the counter demonstration was at one of its fullest points. I was part of the crowd that was pushed back off the road by the police and up against a shop front on that side of the road. We were all backed up there. I was probably, from memory, five or six rows back as part of the protesters. Although we weren't obviously in rows – but hopefully you understand what I mean. The demonstration was several people deep at this stage. There were thousands there. We were pushed back by the Police lines.

23. I remember being on a slightly raised piece of pavement, so I could see down the road. I could see the National Front march come up the street. As it arrived, the crowd on more than one occasion pushed forward to try and break through the Police lines, and ultimately to stop the National Front from marching.

24. Eventually, one of those thrusts pushed through the Police lines. Hundred poured onto the main road. It is possible that the Police lines broke in other areas. The National Front march was broken up. To put it simply the demonstrators got in amongst the Fascists from both sides of the road and the national Front march was essentially broken in two.

25. By that stage, this is my memory, others may have a different recollection of it, the whole National Front demonstration had turned into a 'free for all' between the demonstrators on one side, and the Police and the Fascists on the other. I mean to be honest, to my eyes then, and in my memory now, it was just mayhem in the middle of the road. I mean I'd never seen anything even remotely like that. The upshot of this is that the National Front march more or less disintegrated at that point and ceased to be able to function as a organised demonstration. I don't really remember how long that took but it seems very short in my memory.

Did you or others you were with participate in any violence or disorder? Did you or any one you were with take part in any planning of violence or disorder?

26. In my experience this kind of event is almost impossible to plan. In this case it would have been literally impossible to plan, the forces that actually managed to push through the Police lines weren't the organised left on their own by any means, it was because a very large numbers of young people from the local community turned out, predominantly black youth, who did not want the National Front and the fascists marching through their community.

27. The youth provide the energy that made it possible to disrupt the National Front march. Even if, the left had planned something, it couldn't possibly have had the resources, or the numbers to carry it out and neither would it have been able to coordinate with the people who actually capable of making it happen how to do it. So, in my ways, the organisation of the demonstration of course,

giving out the time, date and the place, that was planned. What actually what happened on the day was radically unplanned. However, in order to explain this, the Police need to believe, and so do the authorities, that the 'red under the bed' has carried out the whole thing, orchestrated it, and planned it all out.

Diversity Information

31. What is your racial origin?

White British

32. What is your gender?

Male

I believe that the content of this statement to be true

Signed: John Rees.....

Date: 02.03.2022