

TRUE SPIES 2. SOMETHING BETTER CHANGE

20th September

Opening Titles - True SPIES

Commentary: Standing lookout over the English Channel, is a Napoleonic relic - Fort Monkton. Today it's a top secret government building - a School for Spies.

Here the Secret State - that's MI5 and Special Branch - trains its top agent handlers. Now for the first time, some break cover.

CHRIS CRADOCK

West Midlands Police Special Branch, 1970-87

Chris Cradock: It was very select...the way they picked the people. 8 people on a course, personalised handling, very detailed lectures...

KEITH

West Midlands Police Special Branch, 1975-86

Keith: It was to brush up on our agent running skills, called 'Field Craft', and that was the use of covert cameras, photographing documents, surveillance, agent running, agent recruiting

Commentary: The late 70s and 80s were turbulent times with Britain convulsed by strikes and street violence between Far Left and Far Right. The Secret State believed parliamentary democracy was under real threat.

Chris Cradock: You got the impression that somebody was worried about something; MI5 must have been worried about something, that at some stage in the future somebody could strike a match and the whole lot would go...

STELLA RIMMINGTON

Director General, MI5, 1992-96

Stella Rimington: Part of the Trotskyist route to revolution is through violence on the streets and through an attempt to kind of undermine the organs of law and order like the police.

Commentary: But it was in the epic showdown between Mrs. Thatcher and the miners that the Secret State was tested to the limit. Could the tide of so-called subversion be stopped?

SIR CHARLES POLLARD

Chief Const, Thames Valley Police, 1991-2002

Charles Pollard: There was no doubt that the mood was shifting and that Mrs Thatcher wasn't going to stand any nonsense as a Prime Minister of this country, and since there were people out there who wanted to destroy the state in effect, and they wanted a socialist state, this was clearly going to be very difficult, and it was going to be the big one.

Sub-title: Something Better Change

Commentary: It's the mid 1970s. Savernake forest in Wiltshire. The Territorial Army on night exercise. A T.A. officer with extreme right wing sympathies has invited some of his fascist friends from the National Front - the NF - to join in. But what the officer doesn't realise is that he's being spied upon- by a Special Branch agent who's penetrated the Far Right.

STEVE

Special Branch Agent, 1974-91

Steve: We developed the idea of infiltrating people into training exercises with his unit so as to enable them to get weapons training.

Interviewer: And what was the purpose of the right wing involvement in this sort of training? What were you told?

Steve: Well obviously they wanted to acquire weapon skills, how to use firearms and explosives and so on.

Commentary: 'Steve' was run on behalf of MI5 by a Special Branch handler. The two worked together for many years.

CHRIS CRADOCK

West Midlands Police Special Branch, 1970-87

Chris Cradock: These were monthly occurrences these camps, and the NF were involved on every occasion. He felt that it was a hostile situation, that at some stage either the NF would attack or somebody would attack the NF in a street battle, and they had to be prepared for that situation.

Steve: The whole rationale of the right is that one day there will be a huge civil war in this country, the blacks and whites fighting each other and you've got to be prepared for this day..

Interviewer: And did you inform MI5?

Chris Cradock: I did on that one immediately, yes.

Commentary: As a result of Steve's spying, embarrassing questions were asked in Parliament about links between the Territorial Army and the Far Right. The weapons training was exposed and stopped.

The National Front exploited attitudes to race that were prevalent at the time. The prejudices were uncomfortably laid bare in a famous TV sitcom [Till Death Us Do Part].

But however much the nation laughed at Alf Garnett, it was no joke when the attitudes he caricatured were translated into menacing rhetoric.

JOHN TYNDALL

February 1978

Archive (John Tyndall):

"No power on earth is now going to stop this movement that we've created.. We'll carry on marching like a great army towards the Britain of our dreams."

Commentary: The Secret State had long monitored the Far Right - from the fascists in the 30s to John Tyndall in the 70s. He openly embraced fascism and admired Adolph Hitler. Like Hitler, Racial purity was his goal.

Archive (John Tyndall):

''Oh I'm quite glad to admit that I'm a racialist completely. There's nothing wrong with being a racialist at all.''

STELLA RIMINGTON

Director General, MI5, 1992-96

Stella Rimington: Fascism, like communism and Trotskyism, because it was aimed at changing a democratic system would have fallen under the definition of subversion.

Commentary: As the Far Right grew stronger, the Secret State needed a spy to infiltrate its ranks. Chris started asking around.

CHRIS CRADOCK

West Midlands Police Special Branch, 1970-87

Chris Cradock: I consulted one of the older colleagues within Special Branch who told me about Steve...so I picked my right moment, went and knocked his door and... There's no small talk, I can remember going to him and telling him exactly who I was.

STEVE

Special Branch Agent, 1974-91

Steve: This man sort of rushed in like a whirlwind and said ''My name is.. I'm a Special Branch officer, and I've got a little job that I think you might be able to help me with''.

Interviewer: And you say?

Steve: Well I'm staggered, I just thought it was some sort of a wind up really, I thought Jeremy Beadle was going to come sailing through door after him.

Commentary: Chris asked Steve to spy on the Far Right. His brief was to infiltrate its ranks and get his hands on membership lists. But like all agents, he lived in constant fear.

Steve: It's really the stress of the double life, the relationships and the feeling of guilt or of loss and that's the thing that's with you forever and a day really.

When you start this sort of work the people that have loved you as a friend and see you as this sort of liberal, mild mannered character, and then suddenly they wake up one morning and there's this Nazi on the doorstep. Will you lose them? I mean I had terrible letters written to me at the time by friends of 20 years telling me that they could never speak to me ever again and wanted nothing to do with me.

Even today I seem them occasionally on the street and they will look across the road at me as if I'm poison and walk on.

Commentary: Homosexuality was not uncommon on the Far Right - and Steve was gay. Chris encouraged him to use his sexuality to elicit the most intimate secrets.

Chris Cradock: He had one or two happier moments when I used to say to him "Go to bed with that man, that boy, and seek out information".

Interviewer: Were you asked to get information through pillow talk?

Steve: Sometimes, yeah.

Interviewer: That's the ultimate betrayal isn't it?

Steve: Well not really. Not when you're talking about casual sex...if you were in a long term relationship with somebody and you were gleaning information off him that would present different problems I think.

Commentary: As a result of his initiative, Steve was able to gather vital intelligence.

Steve: Well for instance, I first heard the rumour through pillow talk that there were guns in circulation, you know... Not just one or two but several.

Interviewer: Did that surprise you?

Steve: It did really that they had managed to source a large amount of firearms, yes.

Commentary: Acting on Steve's tip-off, the police raided the homes of the prime suspects across the Midlands. They uncovered a heavy machine gun, two sterling sub-machine guns, 15,000 rounds of ammunition, a stash of handguns - and more.

Chris Cradock: It wasn't just pistols and firearms, there were bazookas involved, it was a phenomenal amount of firearms, biggest hoist ever done at that time, and I think since.

Steve: Apparently they'd used elderly members, pensioners, on the sort of a conveyer belt thing at this flat, just churning out ammunition. They had a bullet making machine there.

Interviewer: With OAPs?

Steve: With OAPs, yeah.

Commentary: Some of the arms were uncovered at this farmhouse. Several arrests were made. But the finds weren't confined to the Midlands.

Chris Cradock: There were records from a couple of their houses that indicated that the sale of firearms were going on all over the country for some years prior to that. We had a part of whatever was going on, it was far bigger than that.

Commentary: Seven men were sent to gaol. The sentences ranged from x to x years.

STELLA RIMINGTON
Director General, MI5, 1992-96

Stella Rimington: Human sources of intelligence are vital in all intelligence areas. They're often the best source of intelligence and very often know things which you can't pick up from any other intelligence source.

Commentary: For Steve, stopping serious violence made the dangerous double life worthwhile.

Steve: The first time it suddenly hits you with an impact that you've actually saved somebody's home from being petrol bombed, or somebody being shot or.. you realise then that it has a more significant purpose as well, that you are actually achieving something.

Commentary: MI5 cherished its agents. Spying became a profession - with a monthly salary and handsome reward at the end.

Stella Rimington: Could be quite a long career. Thinking back now to the days when I was doing this kind of work. In those days, it would have been viewed by the Security Service that this person was serving the state for many years or for their career, and when they ceased to do it they would have been given a pension.

Commentary: When Steve finally retired, MI5 gave him a £5,000 pay off - in cash.

Interviewer: Sadness, relief?

Steve: You're aware that you've got to start rebuilding aspects of your life again, but relief really that it was finally over.
Archive of street marches

Commentary: The Far Left had its own, less subtle, way of dealing with the Far Right. The National Front was confronted on the streets by the Far Left - with the police in the middle.

In the forefront was the Socialist Workers Party - the SWP. The SWP were prepared to mix it with the best of them - once the National Front had provoked them.

Archive:

"I think in the new situation violence is inevitable. We're not passing this, we're not willing to lie down and be walked on, and if force is used against us we will reply in kind."

Commentary: The SWP was fair game to the spies of Secret State

Stella Rimington: The Socialist Workers Party was a Trotskyist organisation and like Communist organisations Trotskyist organisations fell under the definition of subversion.

Commentary: The Secret State went to extraordinary lengths to find out what the SWP were up to.

The SWP was penetrated by a secret unit of the Metropolitan Police

Special Branch, known as the 'Hairies' - because of their appearance. They devised new identities and lived undercover for long periods of time.

GEOFF

Metropolitan Police Special Branch, 1974-2002

Geoff: There were only a few of us chosen so therefore I wanted to do it... it seemed a good thing to do and obviously you were young at that age.. you know.. you were young at that time, it was exciting, I mean it's an old-fashioned word there was a bit of adventure involved and also it was a challenge.

Commentary: Geoff had no difficulty in joining the SWP which was hungry for members.

Under the umbrella of the Anti-Nazi League, a variety of left-wing groups thronged to a rally against Fascism in London's Victoria Park.

Geoff's main mission was warn his uniformed colleagues of the likelihood of violent disorder.

In the process, he spied on the SWP's leaders and got close to their associates in the Anti Nazi League - like the young Peter Hain.

PETER HAIN

Press Officer, Anti-Nazi League, 1977-80

Archive (Peter Hain):

"The significance of this is that we've brought together tens of thousands of people who've never been on this kind of anti-racist event before but who have done so today, it's the beginnings I think of our fight-back against the racist back-lash in this country."

Commentary: But what Peter Hain did not know was that Geoff, the Hairy, was watching - right at his side.

GEOFF

Metropolitan Police Special Branch, 1974-2002

Geoff: I can remember sitting with Peter Hain on a large sack of cash, or money that was there, and we had to get Securicor to take it back to the Anti Nazi League headquarters because there was lots of money there.

Commentary: It's debatable who gained the most. The Secret State who'd got inside the Far Left - or the Anti-Nazi League who benefited from the organisational skills of a Hairy.

Interviewer: Did Peter Hain have any idea - he wouldn't have thought 'I'm sitting next to an undercover police officer'?

Geoff: You'd have to ask him that question, I don't think he did.

PETER HAIN

Secretary of State for Wales, 2002

Interviewer: We understand that an undercover Special Branch officer who had infiltrated the organisation said that he was collecting the money next to you and the money was just pouring in.

Peter Hain: Good luck to him.

Interviewer: Did you have any suspicions that the person collecting the money with you was an undercover Special Branch officer?

Peter Hain: No, no, and to be frank, as long as the money was going into the coffers of the Anti Nazi League, was enabling us to fight the Nazis and defeat racism, I'd welcome support from wherever it came.

Commentary: At the time, a bewildering variety of factions on the Far Left entered the political arena.

Special Branch recruited spies in every corner of the Far Left - each with their own number.

TONY ROBINSON

Lancashire Police Special Branch, 1965-81

Tony Robinson: Starting off with 672 in the rails branch of Communist Party, industrial branch. Followed up with 735, Workers' Revolutionary Party. Then I had 846 in the International Marxist Group. 919 Revolutionary Students Group 10.77 in the Young Communist League, and Michael - Leyland Motors branch - Communist Party.

Commentary: The splinter group to be seen in was the Workers Revolutionary Party - the WRP. This was revolution with glamour - the vanguard of writers, directors and stars. Vanessa Redgrave was its leading lady.

But MI5 believed the WRP was involved in more than just theatre - much to the outrage of its party members.

ROY BATTERSBY

Workers' Revolutionary Party, 1968-80

Roy Battersby: One has to say that we were legal, we were public, there were no secrets in what we thought. So in a sense you say well how does that make me a subversive. My politics are not about to bring down the state.

Commentary: MI5 told one of its Special Branch handlers in the Midlands that it wanted intelligence on the WRP's educational centre in Derbyshire, known as the 'Red House'.

DENNIS

West Midlands Police Special Branch, 1977-98

Dennis: Let's see what's going on behind closed doors, is this just a leftwing, Trotskyist, revolutionary party spouting out all the information you'd expect them to spout, or is there a hidden agenda?

Commentary: To find out, Dennis recruited an agent to spy on the WRP. MI5 paid him £500 a month -in cash, tax free.

TOM

Special Branch Agent, 1977-87

Interviewer: Did they talk revolution at the Red House?

Tom: They always talk about that, that was their main thing, revolution, that we need to change from this to that.

Archive (Vanessa Redgrave):

"This was the immediate necessity to prepare for the threatening catastrophe which threatens the working class."

Interviewer: What was Vanessa Redgrave like?

Tom: Sometimes she can be very rude, and she would be outspoken, And many times it was say that we should get this government out. Workers' Revolutionary Party should take over, and we can control the workers.

Commentary : There were suspicions that the Red House was more than just a talking shop and that armed revolution was being plotted behind closed doors. Special Branch raided the premises, looking for evidence.

Roy Battersby: They asked me what this door was and I said "oh it's just an empty space, it's going to be for storage and stuff". And they then asked me could I get a stronger bulb for the light on the stairway and I went back into a bathroom and unscrewed a bulb, and by the time I came back out onto the stairs, looking down at this cupboard, they had the cupboard door opened and a Special Branch officer was leaning in, and he came out of the cupboard and I went "Eh! Look what I've found!" And opened his hand and from the top of the stairs I could see that he had three .22 shells in his hand, and I said literally "Where are they supposed to have come from?" And he said "Are you suggesting we planted them?" and I said "I'm not suggesting anything. I'm just telling you that they didn't come from inside that cupboard"

Commentary: Had the Secret State gone too far - to establish something that was never there? Dennis' spy never provided any evidence of a secret agenda.

Dennis: So why was all this money, time and effort spent on it? Because until.. it's like everything else, until you have a look, you don't know, do you. That's the idea of gaining intelligence, to have a look at it.

Archive (car advert):

"Some of you may have noticed that for the past few years Britain has been invaded by the Italians, the Germans, the Japanese and the French. Now we have the means to fight back... The new Austin Metro..."

Commentary: However arguable the need for the Secret State to spy on the revolutionary Left - so-called subversion in British industry was a far more serious proposition.

By the late 70s, the nationalised British Leyland was almost on its knees. Management blamed devastating strikes and hoped for a new beginning - with a brand new model.

Archive (car advert):

"The new Austin Metro.. a British car to beat the world..."

Commentary: The problem was that much of the trouble centred on the Longbridge plant in Birmingham where the Metro was to be made. The main troublemaker was thought to be the chief shop steward, Derek Robinson. Robinson was a member of the Communist Party and Leyland enemy number one.

MI5 had little doubt the Communist Party was behind the strikes. Derek Robinson wasn't known as 'Red Robbo' for nothing. The Secret State kept a close watch on him.

KEITH

West Midlands Police Special Branch, 1975-86

Interviewer: How did you regard Red Robbo?

Keith: As rather a noisy agitator, and excellent at his job because probably the analogy is not very good, but he has similar oratory skills to Hitler, he could hold a crowd...and what he said went.

Archive (Derek Robinson):

"The only language Mr. Edwardes understands..."

Commentary: In 1977, the Labour government called in a South African businessman, Michael Edwardes, to stand up to the militants and stop the rot. He rated 'Red Robbo' as a tough adversary.

SIR MICHAEL EDWARDES

Chairman, British Leyland, 1977-82

Michael Edwardes: I think he damaged not only British Leyland, I think he damaged.. did damage to the whole country. Enormous damage was done, unbelievable, I don't think that the country will ever fully recover from the damage of those days.

DEREK ROBINSON

Longbridge Car Works, 1941-79

Derek Robinson: I hadn't planned to do another Guy Fawkes on the Houses of Parliament, certainly I was looking for change, and I don't see nothing wrong with fighting for change, whether it's the state or not.

Commentary: But to MI5 Red Robbo's idea of change was subversive and they had an agent in place to thwart him. His code-number was 910.

910 was very close to Robinson. He was a Communist, worked at Longbridge and was a member of the same union as Robinson - the AUEW - the Engineers.

Keith: There was a highly placed union official within the AUEW He

knew Robbo, he knew all the top union leaders from whichever union they were in...

He was an easy man to look after, he would enjoy a couple of pints in an ordinary pub somewhere where he may not be recognised, and then always wanted to eat fish and chips in your car before he got home, and that's the way you ran him.

Interviewer: And what kind of information was he able to provide on.. for example Longbridge?

Keith: Their intentions, what they were going to do, the kind of.. the strikes that were going to be called...and he was very, very highly valued.

It was instantly reported on to MI5, MI5 I know because .. they came to see him quite a lot, and they held him in the highest regard.

Commentary: By 1979 there's a new Prime Minister in Downing Street. Mrs Thatcher is determined to take on the militants she believes are destroying British industry.

Archive (Margaret Thatcher):

"Where there is discord, may we bring harmony, and I'll strive unceasingly to try to fulfil the trust and confidence that the British people have placed in me."

Commentary: Astonishingly, a political decision is taken to reveal Agent 910's top secret reports on Red Robbo.

Behind Whitehall's closed doors, Michael Edwardes is shown the fruits of 910's spying.

Michael Edwardes: I was privileged to read minutes of meetings of the.. of the joint committee of the Communist Party and our shop stewards, and it was absolutely clear that the intention was to break the company.

Interviewer: Whereabouts did you read the minutes?

Michael Edwardes: Normally in the cabinet office. It was a very silent meeting, I was handed them, I read them, I pulled a face, handed them back and got on with the job.

Interviewer: What did the minutes tell you?

Michael Edwardes: They were totally destructive, I mean they.. they talked about bringing the company down... bringing the country down... it was a very negative exercise, intending to damage the country and the company.

Interviewer: Were you a subversive?

Derek Robinson: No, definitely not, and as far as I was concerned with management was what was in the interests of the workers, were the wages sufficient? Were the conditions in which they work satisfactory? which are normal, legitimate trade union activities.

Commentary: The crunch came over Edwardes' determination to replace Leyland's old timers.

Michael Edwardes: The main board took the view that BL Cars had to be authorised to take whatever action it needed to take to secure the future of the Metro.

Interviewer: So was it Derek Robinson or the Metro?

Michael Edwardes: I don't think there's any doubt about it, that was what it was about.

Commentary: Robinson and his comrades were bitterly opposed to the production of the Metro since it involved the loss of 25,000 jobs

What they didn't know was that, behind the scenes MI5's agent 910 was secretly stirring up opposition to Red Robbo.

Robinson and his comrades published a pamphlet opposing the Edwardes Plan - although 80% of the workforce had voted to back it. Robinson made himself a marked man by writing the section that urged industrial action.

Commentary: He was summoned to the boss's office at Longbridge and refused to back down.

Derek Robinson: When the works director turned over his sheet of paper, I was immediately conscious that a prepared statement had been made that my sacking would take place instantly, which it was.

I'm supposed to live in a democracy and as a consequence in my very naïve way I think I'm entitled to express alternative viewpoints that people may quarrel with...I'm denied the right of free speech, and Mr Edwardes has got all the power in the world to deal with this pesky shop steward.

Commentary: At a mass meeting, Robinson asked the Longbridge workforce to vote for strike action to support his reinstatement.

To Robinson's surprise, but not MI5's, the support was not there. 910 had greased the wheels.

Interviewer: Did you know that there was a person placed within your union who was close to you, who was providing through Special Branch to MI5 intelligence on all that you were doing?

Derek Robinson: No, I wasn't aware that any such person existed or indeed carried out any such activity. Of course I'd be.. feel betrayed, and I would think they'd be traitors... they'll probably have it on their conscience for the rest of their lives...

Commentary: Within a year, with Red Robbo gone, the Metro finally made its grand entrance.

Interviewer: Was Derek Robinson's removal planned?

Michael Edwardes: It was planned only in the sense.. well the answer is 'Yes', from a strategic point of view we knew that we couldn't have the Metro and him... whether or not we wanted him to

go, his actions made it inevitable that he would have to go.

Commentary: Mrs. Thatcher's hard line galvanised the hard left into greater militancy. Elected politicians, like Derek Hatton, the flamboyant deputy leader of Liverpool City Council, now attracted the spy's attention.

By the early 80s, the Militant Tendency dominated the Council, putting into practice the revolutionary socialism that Derek Hatton preached.

To the Secret State, Militant was a highly organised Trotskyite group bent on infiltrating the Labour Party. Its supporters denied the organisation existed and swore there weren't any members.

Militant was one of the most secretive organisations on the revolutionary Left and for the Secret State, one of the most difficult to spy on. It's internal security was fearful - Getting inside was not easy. But what Militant didn't know was that spies routinely monitored its annual conference.

TONY ROBINSON

Lancashire Police Special Branch, 1965-81

Tony Robinson: So we crept in into the little cubby hole at 8 o'clock in the morning with a bucket to cater for our needs, and we stayed there until all the delegates had left, oh.. after nearly 7 o'clock at night, and we recorded the proceedings on a small, Swiss high tech tape recorder provided by MI5 for us.

Interviewer: What was it like being locked in this cupboard...

Tony Robinson: Rather frightening, because the Militant Tendency is a Trotskyist group, and as I've already said, the Trotskyists are not above violence and a lot of the rank and file were not averse to dishing it out. And so we were that near to people standing at the back of the hall and just the width of a wooden.. small, thin wooden partition, looking through a peep hole.

And we were obviously terrified of making any form of noise because it would have been heard immediately.

Interviewer: Including the bucket?

Tony Robinson: Including the bucket. The sides had to be used, you know, you perfect these techniques don't you.

Commentary: The Secret State had no doubt that Militant was dangerously subversive and believed its leading lights should be watched.

Interviewer: Was there a file on Derek Hatton?

Tony Robinson: There was a file on Derek Hatton. But I can only say that on the file, he only came to my notice as being a very active member of the Militant Tendency.

Commentary: Eventually Derek Hatton and his Militant comrades on Merseyside were kicked out of the Labour Party following an internal investigation.

The Secret State became even more concerned when it saw Militant supporters being elected not just to local councils but to Westminster too.

By the mid 80s, there were three Labour MPs in the House of Commons - all prominent Militant supporters. One was Coventry MP, David Nellist. MI5 contacted the local Special Branch.

Interviewer: Did MI5 ask you to find an agent to infiltrate Militant?

Denis: Yes.

Interviewer: And did you?

Denis: Yes.

DAVID NELLIST MP
Coventry south East, 1983-91

Dave Nellist: I think it was completely out of order for MI5 a) to consider Militant supporters as subversive and b) to be investigating us.

Commentary: Dennis's agent infiltrated Militant and cultivated David Nellist.

DENNIS
West Midlands Police Special Branch, 1977-98

Denis: They were pretty close. He helped him on a lot of things. He went around with him to a lot of meetings. He was.. he worked with him quite a bit as David knew a lot of people and they mixed quite a lot together, yeah.

Commentary: Spying on members of allegedly subversive organisations is one thing but serious questions are raised when an elected Member of Parliament is involved.

Interviewer: Did you know that MI5 was running one of its agents, an MI5 spy, within Coventry Labour Party?

Dave Nellist: No I didn't.

Interviewer: Does that surprise you?

Dave Nellist: On a personal basis it does surprise me, it also angers me. What was the state doing in investigating, if it was me, an elected member of Parliament who had the support of thousands of people in the area to go off and do a job down in London, what right did MI5 have to investigate somebody on that basis?

Commentary: MI5 maintains it targets organisations not individuals. It's a bit like saying you're watching Manchester United and not David Beckham.

Interviewer: Why are you putting a Member of Parliament under surveillance?

Denis: Because we're not. The Militant...

Interviewer: You were reporting back on him.

Denis: Well we're reporting back on Militant.

Interviewer: And on Dave Nellist.

Denis: Yeah because he was at a meeting where Militant people were there.

Dave Nellist: I've got nothing to apologise about for being a socialist, but I think that the state has got something to apologise for in placing people next to both elected Members of Parliament or ordinary people in general, in acting in an underhand and a secretive way.

Commentary: From the moment Mrs. Thatcher had walked into Downing Street, a showdown between the so-called subversives and the Secret State had seemed almost inevitable - and there was little doubt who the opposition would be.

CHARLES POLLARD

Metropolitan Police, 1964-79

Charles Pollard: There was going to be a crunch, and it was all totally open. The miners said they were going to take on Mrs Thatcher, I mean it was as open as that. And looking at the scenario on the streets, and the laws we had to try and deal with particularly over picketing, this was clearly going to be very difficult, and it was going to be the big one.

Commentary : At its secret spy school at Fort Monkton, MI5 planned for the worst - virtually a civil war scenario. It summoned selected Special Branch officers for advanced training in agent handling.

Tony Robinson: There was a sort of urgency injected into the situation by virtue of the fact that we were lectured to by a variety of experts from MI5.

Commentary: The chosen few were also lectured on the industrial unrest that plagued British industry. Individual unions were singled out - most notably the miners.

Interviewer: Why did they want you to look at the National Union of Mineworkers?

Tony Robinson: Well they had a leader, Arthur Scargill, who was flexing his muscles.

Commentary: Scargill had been the Conservatives' sworn enemy since the 1972 miners strike. Then his flying pickets had forced the closure of Saltley Gate coke depot and ultimately helped topple the Conservative government of the day.

The Secret State could not afford to let it happen again.

Interviewer: How did you view Scargill?

Charles Pollard: Well I suppose as a police officer trying to be neutral one saw.. regarded him as a total rabble rouser who was trying to stir people up to take on the government and quite openly was saying he was going to bring the government down.

Commentary: Scargill had once been a member of the Young Communist League. To the Secret State, he had subversive written all over him.

ARTHUR SCARGILL

President, N.U.M. 1981-2002

Arthur Scargill: It's because of my views, because of my passion, that they regard me as an enemy of the state. I'm an enemy of capitalism, I am a supporter of socialism and it's for that reason that it doesn't surprise me that the state and its security services have always targeted me and regarded me as a subversive.

Commentary: Mrs Thatcher was determined to stand up to those she believed were out to destroy freedom and democracy.

The government a top secret exercise the scenario described a miner's strike being 'energetically pursued'. It said "Militants will be seeking to exploit and extend the strike with a view to bringing down the government."

Charles Pollard: I think it's totally prophetic, and it probably didn't take much imagination to plan it. You'll find usually exercise planners are pretty good to work out what could happen, and in this case anticipated things almost exactly as they did happen later on.

Commentary: The strike became increasingly violent as flying pickets from all over the country converged on Orgreave coking plant. Scargill hoped to repeat Saltley Gate.

The dramatic images of that violent day are etched on the memory of the senior officer in charge on the ground.

TONY CLEMENT

Asst Chief Constable, S.Yorks Police, 1981-85

Tony Clement: There was violence, there was violence on both sides. You cannot expect that sort of situation to arise when police officers are not at times going to lose their temper or lose their cool or their discipline disappears. It would happen to me, I feel sure, if I was in that situation. There were what, 30 or 40 police officers a day being taken to hospital. We didn't have that sort of situation in this country, they didn't attack police officers like that, not at that time, not until our friend Mr Scargill decided that that was the way to impose his will.

Commentary: Scargill was on the front line, marshalling his troops to confront the police who'd been drafted in from the Met and Forces nationwide.

Tony Clement: He thought he was going to win... It was symbolic, it was a trial of strength. He said I'm going close that. We said you're not.

Commentary: The local police commander heard that the Met had placed a bounty on Scargill's arrest. He made it clear that if anyone was to nick Arthur, it was to be him.

JOHN NESBIT

South Yorkshire Police, 1962-92

John Nesbit: I asked him to move and he was very conscious that the television cameras were there, and he decided to stand his ground. He was then cautioned and arrested and processed.

Interviewer: Did you get the bounty?

John Nesbit: No I didn't. No I didn't. I've had one or two drinks off it since.

Commentary: But for Scargill, the strike was part of a far wider political agenda.

Interviewer: Did you want to bring Mrs Thatcher down?

Arthur Scargill: I wanted at all times to get rid of a Conservative government by legitimate means, but above all what I intended was that the British mining industry should survive and it should be developed and expanded.

Commentary: To meet the political threat, the Secret State decided that covert means would have to be used to spy on its enemies.

At the time, Stella Rimington was Assistant Director of the MI5 division that countered domestic subversion.

STELLA RIMINGTON

Director General, MI5, 1992-96

Stella Rimington: The leaders of the miners strike themselves had actually said that one of the purposes of the miners strike was to overthrow Mrs Thatcher who was the elected Prime Minister of the country and the industrial department of the Communist Party was very involved in all sorts of different ways in the strike and that was of concern to us, that's what we were interested in.

Commentary: Of particular interest to MI5 was the triumvirate who ran the strike - a Communist Mick McGahey, Peter Heathfield and Arthur Scargill.

ARTHUR SCARGILL

President, N.U.M. 1981-2002

Arthur Scargill: There were agents planted within the NUM both for a number of years prior to 1984 in readiness, almost like sleepers. I believe that all our offices were constantly bugged. I also know that I was under close personal supervision, so to speak, wherever I went and whoever I met. That was what was happening.

Commentary: When the NUM's Chief Executive, Roger Windsor, embraced Libya's Colonel Ghaddafi, it hardly helped the miners' PR. MI5 judged Scargill and his comrades by the company they kept.

Arthur Scargill: Roger Windsor went to Libya to put the case of the union in common with many other members of the National Union of Mine Workers who went all over the world...to put the case of the miners... because it was an international struggle.

Commentary: Windsor was subsequently alleged to have been an MI5 Agent, which he denied and won substantial damages to clear his name. But to MI5 the Libyan connection confirmed Scargill needed watching.

Stella Rimington: Well, when you consider Colonel Gaddafi's other connections with the Provisional IRA, for example, it says something about judgement, if no more.

Commentary: Although Scargill himself never had any direct dealing with Ghaddafi, he did have friends elsewhere - at the Soviet Embassy in London. With the NUM in deep financial trouble Soviet comrades were ready to help.

Interviewer: Money to help the miners' cause. Nothing wrong with that, is there?

Stella Rimington: Well, it is.. interference by a foreign power in the internal affairs of this country.

Commentary: But it wasn't just MI5 that was working covertly. The millionaire, David Hart, was one of the Prime Minister's closest advisers during the strike. He was effectively an arm of the Secret State.

With cover as a journalist he saw the violent intimidation faced by miners determined to return to work.

Behind the scenes, he helped devise a strike-breaking strategy by giving active support to those who wanted to get back to their pits.

DAVID HART

Unofficial adviser to Mrs Thatcher, 1984-85

Interviewer: Did you outline that strategy to Mrs Thatcher?

David Hart: Oh yes, absolutely, yes.

Interviewer: Did she say go ahead and do it?

David Hart: Oh yes, she was encouraging me to do what I was doing.

Interviewer: And what about the money that was necessary to make the strategy possible?

David Hart: Well I provided some money to the National Working Miners at the beginning and then I found other sources of money and I made myself responsible for making sure that they had the money.

Commentary: Hart directed his strategy from his luxury suite at Claridge's where he met leaders of the miners who wanted to return to work.

David Hart: I then started to talk to them about what they might do about it, how it might be organised and so on, and in particular about providing protection to the leaders of those working miners because they were seriously threatened by NUM activists. Working miners being abused outside their homes when returning from pit under police protection

Commentary: Pit villages became deeply divided. It was a brave or rash miner who, under police protection, was prepared to run the daily gauntlet of hate from his neighbours.

Interviewer: How did you provide protection for them?

David Hart: I arranged for private sector, mostly ex-SAS people to protect them.

Interviewer: Former SAS people to protect the...

David Hart: Yes, to protect the families of the working miners.

Interviewer: And who paid for the ex-SAS?

David Hart: I paid for that.

Commentary: If Hart's strategy was to be effective, working miners had to get through the pit gates. Scargill's pickets had to be outmanoeuvred. The police had to be one step ahead.

As with Red Robbo, intelligence provided by a Secret State spy was the key.

Although Stella Rimington steadfastly refuses to be drawn about monitoring Scargill's Headquarters, we can reveal that the Secret State was running a highly placed agent, close to Scargill and the leadership of the NUM.

We understand the agent's codename was 'Silver Fox'.

TONY CLEMENT

Asst Chief Constable, S.Yorks Police, 1981-85

Tony Clement: There was a fairly senior man within the NUM who was talking to Special Branch. He was at the level where he would sit round the table with the NUM leadership.

John Nesbit: We were in a position to get information, very, very specific and precise information that was correct every time, as to where the violent picketing would be taking place, particularly when the miners started to go back to work.

Every time we got the information - that I understand came from a Special Branch informant - was absolutely spot on and allowed me to deploy men and to successfully carry out a police operation.

Commentary: Victory or defeat for the miners would be decided on the picket lines. 'Silver Fox', the Secret State's spy in Scargill's inner sanctum, gave the police the crucial advantage.

Interviewer: Did you know that there was an agent very close to you at your shoulder almost who was feeding information to his or her Special Branch handler about the movement of pickets during the '84 strike?

Arthur Scargill: I would be amazed if there wasn't.

Interviewer: Doesn't come as any surprise?

Arthur Scargill: Not at all.

Interviewer: Do you know who this person was?

Arthur Scargill: I haven't got a clue and I wouldn't like to guess, because I know from experience that you can always make assumptions that are wrong, and so I rule nobody in and I rule nobody out.

Commentary: The intelligence that 'Silver Fox' enabled more miners to go back to work. Finally the strike collapsed, the union split. Hart's strategy worked.

John Nesbit: That information we got from Special Branch I think beat the strike, there's no doubt about that. And without that information I don't think we could have managed it. Scargill leads men back to work.

Commentary: Scargill led his men back to work with heads held high. The Secret State, having helped see off Derek Robinson, had now helped rout Arthur Scargill and his allies on the revolutionary Left.

DAVID HART

Unofficial adviser to Mrs Thatcher, 1984-85

David Hart: It seems to me to be one of those big turning points in history really. I mean a turning point in history is something that future generations have to decide upon. We all felt, I think, that this sort of long battle with Marxism was over, that it had had it after that.

Commentary: But to Scargill the Secret State had fought the battle in an underhand and repressive way?

Arthur Scargill: It is absolutely true that I wanted to do everything in my power to legitimately bring about a change of government. Now that's nothing wrong with that...

Interviewer: Legitimately?

Arthur Scargill: That's what I said. And there's nothing wrong with that, and provided that that's clearly understood then it means that all their surveillance on Arthur Scargill is not only illegal, is not only against the whole question of human rights and civil liberties, but in my view flies in the face of democracy itself. And today the target may be Arthur Scargill, and tomorrow the target may be you.

Commentary: The Secret State's preparations at Fort Monkton had not been in vain. The miners were crushed. The Fort trained its

spies to defend our freedoms, but to those on the receiving end they undermined them instead.

For more information on tonight's programme, visit our website at www.bbc.co.uk/true_spies.

In next week's programme...

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