

IN THE MATTER OF THE UNDERCOVER POLICING INQUIRY

BEFORE SIR JOHN MITTING

**OPENING STATEMENT ON BEHALF OF
FRIENDS OF FREEDOM PRESS FOR TRANCHE 2, PHASE 1**

Preamble

1. The Friends of Freedom Press (FFP) are the directors of the UK's longest running anarchist publishing house (Freedom Press) and anarchist newspaper (*Freedom*) established in 1886. And they are Special Branch's oldest enemy. Not only was Special Branch set up to combat anarchism in general, but *Freedom* has been one of their principal targets for over a century. The Special Operations Squad of Special Branch set up in 1968, which became the Special Demonstration Squad (SDS), also had anarchists as one of their principal targets, and when MI5 and Special Branch decided to infiltrate *Freedom* directly in 1980, they chose an officer, DS Roger Pearce (using the cover name of 'Roger Thorley'), who of all SDS undercover officers (UCOs) was to rise to the highest position in the Metropolitan Police Service (MPS), from the DCI in charge of SDS, to Commander of Special Branch, and beyond that to Director of Intelligence.
2. After some six years of waiting for the chance to put their case, the FFP have been allotted just 30 minutes to do so by the Undercover Policing Inquiry (UCPI). To do justice to Special Branch's war on anarchism, a book would have to be written. Even to deal fully with SDS's spying on *Freedom* is impossible in such a short time. For that reason, this written version is much

longer than the abridged version we will be presenting orally. So please, if you are interested, read this written version that will appear on the UCPI website, in conjunction with the witness statement of Stephen Sorba, Secretary of FFP, who will give evidence on Freedom's behalf on Monday 8 July 2024.

Introductory remarks

3. FFP is a limited company whose directors have the overarching legal responsibility for the anarchist run and owned premises in Angel Alley, the official address of which is 84b Whitechapel High Street, London E1. This building is the home of Freedom Press and the *Freedom* newspaper, as well as the Freedom bookshop. All are run on a day-to-day basis by the Freedom Collective, anarchists who dedicate their free time and energy to maintaining the anarchist presence in the heart of London.
4. The Freedom building also houses other autonomous groups, such as the Advisory Service for Squatters (ASS). Many squatters were anarchists and vice-versa throughout the period currently under scrutiny by the UCPI, namely 1968 to 2008. ASS is completely autonomous from Freedom, but their volunteers participate in collective decision making concerning the building.
5. Freedom contributed to the Opening Statement made collectively in October 2020 at the start of the Tranche 1 hearings on behalf of all the Non-State Core Participants (NSCPs) who we represent. Freedom also supports and adopts all the general points made therein which we do not have time to cover again here.
6. For those reading this Opening Statement, *Freedom* in italics will refer to the newspaper, whilst Freedom without italics will refer to the building, the bookshop and the press. FFP was chosen to apply for Core Participant status, as several of its directors were activists in the 1970s and 1980s who had a memory of that period. This generation has now been superseded by younger activists who keep the traditions of anarchist thought and action alive, whilst dealing with all the new challenges of the modern world.

7. There are many individual anarchists who are NSCPs, and some other anarchist groups are also involved in the UCPI, but we did not hear evidence from any of them during Tranche 1 which dealt with the period from 1968 to 1982. Anarchism and anarchists have been touched on in the documents released so far but will be given a little more prominence in Tranche 2.
8. Consequently, we wish to make some general observations about anarchism, Freedom's history and the interface with secret policing in the UK, which largely means Special Branch but also, in the shadows, the Security Service, better known to many as MI5, and in GCHQ¹ parlance, as the British Security Service (BSS).
9. We stand by the general remarks we made in our Tranche 1 Opening Statement in October 2020 and our Tranche 1 Closing Statement in February 2023.
10. After he had given his Opening Statement for Tranche 1, Dave Morris (a NSCP representing himself) was asked by the UCPI Chairman what books about anarchism he should read. Amongst the four books that Dave Morris later recommended were *Anarchism: A Very Short Introduction* by Colin Ward, a longstanding member of the Freedom Collective and editor of the original *Anarchy* magazine (1961-70) and *Demanding the Impossible: A History of Anarchism* by Peter Marshall, currently a Director of the Friends of Freedom Press.² We commend both books to the Chairman and to those reading this Opening Statement.
11. In addition, there is *Anarchy in Action*, also by Colin Ward, and *About Anarchism*, a Freedom Press publication by Nicholas Walter which Roger Pearce attached to his intelligence report dated 27 October 1982 and reviewed in the following terms:

“This well-written pamphlet, produced by probably the most prominent of today’s intellectual anarchist genre, is of inestimable

¹ Government Communications Headquarters in Cheltenham, the centre of the UK’s digital spying network

² See https://www.ucpi.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2023/02/20230221-Morris-T1-Closing_Statement.pdf

value to anyone seeking a survey of the anarchist scene which is both comprehensive and concise. It is cited time and again as the publication which guided the political and apolitical alike to espousal of anarchism. Walter himself, whilst remaining somewhat distant from most current activities retains his commitment and sends occasional articles to 'Freedom.' He is a cautious, alert individual whose sardonic temperament is met with respect or intense dislike, but never indifference.”³

Freedom and the UCPI

12. In 2015, FFP was refused Core Participant status on the grounds that it was then thought unlikely they would have a significant role to play in the UCPI. However, this was reviewed in 2018 when it became apparent from the notes kept by Operation Herne that the former UCO given the cypher HN85, namely Roger Pearce, was said to be “editor of Freedom Press in Whitechapel and in that capacity wrote virulent anti-police articles.” As a result, FFP was designated as a NSCP in Category K – political activists.⁴
13. During Tranche 1, the UCPI provided FFP with some disclosure and allowed the disclosure to be circulated to seven current or former FFP Directors. However, for Tranche 2, this has been limited to the current Secretary, Stephen Sorba, who has provided Freedom’s witness statement, and one former director, Dr Martin Peacock, who features in several intelligence reports from the 1980s.
14. While the Freedom disclosure was given to both Stephen Sorba and Dr Martin Peacock, each also received his own personal disclosure which could not be shared with the other, due to the terms of their individual Restriction Orders imposed by the UCPI. When we discovered that another former member of the Freedom Collective from the 1980s, Dave McCabe, had critical information to share about Roger Pearce, we were forbidden to share his personal disclosure (which consisted of some 140 intelligence reports), nor was Dave McCabe allowed to see the Freedom disclosure or the intelligence reports that named

³ See UPCI0000015835

⁴ See Core Participants Ruling 17 (20/3/18) – https://www.ucpi.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2018/03/20180320_ruling_core_participant_17.pdf

Stephen Sorba and Dr Martin Peacock. Even Freedom's counsel was not allowed to see Dave McCabe's disclosure, as Dave McCabe was neither a NSCP nor asked for a witness statement by the UCPI, despite our submission that he had highly relevant evidence to give.

15. These barriers constructed by the UCPI are a huge hindrance to the process of obtaining the best evidence from a group like Freedom concerning the past activities of UCOs dating back decades. Furthermore, the UCPI has not assisted by providing us with a contemporary photo of Roger Pearce from the period when he was spying on Freedom. Sadly, many Freedom Collective members do not remember Roger Pearce at all. As a result, Stephen Sorba has had to add Dave McCabe's recollections to his witness statement, without being able to discuss all the relevant intelligence reports with Dave McCabe.
16. The delays in the UCPI providing intelligence reports to us has also made it extremely difficult for us to contact potentially relevant witnesses, or only being able to track them down at a very late stage, either by patient research, or by luck. One example is Patrizia Giambi, the Italian artist, whose tale we will come to later. We are very grateful that she has agreed to share her fascinating yet shocking story with us, to illuminate the insidious role played by Special Branch in political prosecutions.⁵
17. It goes without saying that the intelligence reports about Freedom are necessarily very partial and fragmentary. This is a natural consequence of the UCPI being forced, through the obsessive institutional secrecy of both MI5 and Special Branch,⁶ to hide as much as possible about SDS from the public. It is unsurprising that the Judge appointed to lead the UCPI is a former Chairman of the Special Immigration Appeals Commission (SIAC), the first secret court since the hated 'Star Chamber' abolished by a rebellious House of Commons in 1641. Appointed by the Lord Chancellor, any SIAC Chair would inevitably have to have the highest security clearance to be allowed to view 'Top Secret' material. We are concerned that working in such a top secret environment over a number of years might have affected the UCPI's approach to openness,

⁵ Patrizia Giambi's witness statement, when published, merits careful reading as it demonstrates the undemocratic and subversive lengths to which Special Branch is prepared to go.

⁶ Special Branch (SO12) is now absorbed into MPS's Counter-Terrorism Command.

and almost all NSCPs have rightly been upset at the desperate endeavours of the MPS to ensure that as much as possible remains secret.⁷ The last eight years of this tortuous process has now been carefully analysed in *Spycops: Secrets and Disclosure in the Undercover Policing Inquiry*.⁸

18. The outcome of this across-the-board institutional secrecy has led to some important evidence being given in closed session, and to a mass of redactions in the documents. For instance, we are still forbidden to know the names of all the groups spied on, whether anarchist, left-wing, environmental or community groups or from the far right. In our view, the publication at the very least of those names was the litmus test for whether the UCPI was going to be open and transparent. The only reason we are not being told all the names appears to be to protect the identities of UCOs from decades ago. Another NSCP demand was for full disclosure of their own files. This too has been denied. Instead, the UCPI is only disclosing documents to a NSCP that they think are pertinent and contain a reference to that NSCP. Additionally, these documents are of course redacted for state secrecy and privacy. It is a process that is both enormously time consuming and costly. Obviously, there is still plenty that the British state wants to hide.
19. However, we do have an inquiry about an aspect of the secret state – undercover political policing – that we have never seen before in the UK. And for anarchists, being targets of this type of policing goes back a long way – right back to the founding of Freedom in 1886. In that sense, Freedom has a lot to say and, consequently, we set out some of that history in the hope it may shed some light on where we are today.
20. We also urge anyone who is interested to read the witness statement of Freedom’s Secretary, Stephen Sorba, when it is publicly disclosed on the UCPI website, for more detail of the spying on Freedom in the 1980s.
21. Lastly, in this introductory section, we would like to take this opportunity to pay tribute to Freedom’s former comrade Donald Room (1928-2019), a cartoonist

⁷ We do not absolve MI5 of the same institutional secrecy. However, the remit of the UCPI does not extend to a full investigation of MI5’s role which, therefore, remains opaque.

⁸ *Spycops: Secrets and Disclosure in the Undercover Policing Inquiry* by Raphael Schlembach (Policy Press, 2024)

and writer who remained engaged with Freedom right up until his recent death at the age of 91. He attended meetings about the UCPI and was very keen to participate, with a view to discovering more about secret political policing. We hope that our research and involvement do justice to his memory.

Early practices of Special Branch against anarchists

22. The Metropolitan Police had already set up a Special Irish Branch in 1883 to monitor Irish Republicans. However, in 1887, following the police attack on protestors on “Bloody Sunday”, the anarchists also came under their scrutiny, and the unit became simply the Special Branch. This was just a year after the anarchist publication, *Freedom*, was first launched.
23. One of the first successful Special Branch actions against anarchists was the uncovering of the so-called ‘Walsall Plot’ in 1892, for which four anarchists were charged with conspiracy to manufacture explosives. It transpired that it was actually a plot dreamed up by Special Branch using an *agent provocateur*, Auguste Coulon, whose handler was Chief Inspector Melville of Special Branch who reported to the Assistant Commissioner (the same hierarchical structure that continued to operate in the 1980s). Coulon was paid £1 a week for his services. In Parliament, the Home Secretary lied about the case, and during the trial the Judge (known colloquially as “Hanging Hawkins”) refused to let Melville answer the question posed by the defence as to whether Coulon was his agent. As a result, several anarchists went to prison. When the *agent provocateur* was exposed in the pages of the anarchist paper, *Commonweal*, the Metropolitan Police raided the premises, arrested the editor and smashed up the press. In total, Coulon was paid £800 for his services over 10 years.⁹
24. In November 1898, 54 delegates from 21 countries gathered in Rome for what was named, rather grandly, the ‘International Conference for Social Defence against Anarchists.’¹⁰ Every participating government agreed to set up special organisations for the surveillance of those suspected of anarchism, defined as

⁹ See <https://radicalhistorynetwork.blogspot.com/p/about.html>

¹⁰ *The History of International Police Cooperation* by Matthieu Deflem in *The Encyclopedia of Criminology*, edited by Richard Wright & J Mitchell Miller (New York: Routledge, 2005)

"any act that used violent means to destroy the organisation of society." On matters of practical policing, the Rome protocol included plans to encourage police to keep watch over anarchists, to establish in every participating country a specialised surveillance agency to achieve this goal, and to organise a system of information exchange among these national agencies. A few years later in 1904, a further conference in St Petersburg drew up a 'Secret Protocol for the International War on Anarchism.' While the British government declined to sign, they did agree to cooperate.

25. Around this time, in 1907, *The Secret Agent* by Joseph Conrad was published – a novel about how a naive young anarchist blows himself up with his own bomb, having been deliberately set up by a Russian secret policeman acting as an *agent provocateur* whose political aim is to throw opprobrium onto the anarchists to get them expelled from their safe haven in Britain.
26. In short, the history of spying on anarchists in this period is also the history of state intervention, provocation, fabrication and an attack on the supposed 'freedom of the press.' The historian, EP Thompson, summed it up when he said that "it was the fond belief of the English people that the employment of spies in domestic affairs was un-British, and belonged to the 'continental spy system'. In fact, it was an ancient part of British Statecraft as well as of police practice."¹¹ Special Branch were the political police in Britain and became well-versed in such tactics.

Freedom and Special Branch

27. *Freedom* was founded as a monthly journal newspaper in 1886 during the zenith of British imperialism, at a time when socialist and anarchist ideas were spreading widely amongst the working class.¹²
28. For its 100th anniversary, *Freedom* published a commemorative book, printed by Aldgate Press in the building adjacent to Freedom Books. And for the 50th

¹¹ *The Making of the English Working Class* by EP Thompson (1963)

¹² See <https://freedompress.org.uk/history>

anniversary of the purchase of the premises in Angel Alley, Freedom published *A Beautiful Idea: History of the Freedom Press Anarchists* by Rob Ray.¹³

29. Freedom Press is the oldest anarchist publishing house in the English-speaking world. For almost 140 years, it has weathered wars, police raids, fascist attacks and innumerable internal crises, while publishing some of the world's most important libertarian thinkers, from Peter Kropotkin and Emma Goldman to Colin Ward and Murray Bookchin.
30. *Freedom (A Journal of Anarchist Socialism)* was the name given to the anarchist paper printed from October 1886, and inspired by Charlotte Wilson, a well-known member of the Fabian Society, and Peter Kropotkin, the famous Russian anarchist, then recently arrived from Paris. It aimed to be an independent voice within the wider working-class movement, rather than tied to any particular political organisation. It has continued to operate in that fashion through to the present day.
31. The outbreak of World War One in 1914 was an event of global historical significance that ultimately created the conditions for the Russian Revolution. The socialist parties across Europe failed to oppose the war, and even anarchists such as Peter Kropotkin were not immune (arguing the case for supporting the Allies in the November 1914 edition of *Freedom*). However, the vast majority of anarchists opposed the war, and many defied conscription. This led to the first police raid on 5 May 1916 during which the press itself was destroyed and a van load of publications seized. In June 1916, Tom Keell and Lilian Wolfe, the *Freedom* editors, were tried under the Defence of the Realm Act 1914 and sent to jail for two and three months respectively.
32. The anarchist opposition to capitalist war was not just a matter of simple pacifism. During the Spanish Civil War (1936-39), *Freedom* supported (albeit not uncritically) the Republican cause, in which the anarchist militias played a large part.
33. *Freedom* largely ceased publication in 1927, as large sections of the working-class movement turned to communism due to the apparent success of the Bolshevik seizure of power during the Russian Revolution. The anarchists in

¹³ See <https://freedompress.org.uk/product/a-beautiful-idea-history-of-the-freedom-press-anarchists>

Russia were the strongest dissenters on the revolutionary side and were mercilessly repressed. Anarchists had always recognised the danger of an authoritarian state masquerading as a revolutionary movement, and were to be proved sadly all too prescient. Anarchism became an even smaller minority current everywhere, except in Spain.

34. In 1936, a young Italian anarchist, Vero Recchione, fleeing from fascist Italy, began a new paper called *Spain and the World*. Freedom Press took on the responsibility of publishing it. The anarchist cause in Spain revived the anarchist movement in England, but with its defeat, and the start of World War Two in 1939, the paper changed its name to *War Commentary* and reverted to its opposition to capitalist war. Unsurprisingly, further police raids followed and in April 1945 the four *Freedom* editors, Vero Recchione, his wife Marie-Louise Berneri, Phillip Sansom and Dr Paul Hewetson were charged with 'incitement to disaffection' for distributing *Freedom*, and all except Berneri were sentenced to nine months in prison.¹⁴ Roger Pearce no doubt read some of the files on these *Freedom* activists prior to his deployment.
35. During this time there was also an important split between the Freedom group and a syndicalist faction concerning the overall direction of the anarchist movement in the UK, a division which was to be continually replicated over the next 60 years. Freedom was seen to be too intellectual and middle class and too strongly linked to pacifism, as opposed to the syndicalist supporters who believed that anarchism could only be realised through a strong working class organised in unions in the manner of the CNT-AIT in Spain during the Spanish Civil War. These differing ideas led to decades of acrimony, which the UCO Roger Pearce later exploited.
36. By 1960, under the direction of Vernon Richards (as Vero Recchione was now known), *Freedom* went weekly and sold about 2,000 to 3,000 copies an issue. The 1960s gave a new lease of life to anarchism, the same period which also saw the growth of the 'New Left.' Two particular issues saw the rise of

¹⁴ See a full account of the prosecution in context in *Anarchism and the British Warfare State: The Prosecution of the War Commentary Anarchists, 1945* by Carissa Honeywell (2015) in *International Review of Social History*, 60 (02) – <https://shura.shu.ac.uk/12980/10/Honeywell-AnarchismBritishWarfare%28AM%29.pdf>

anarchist ideas – the anti-nuclear peace movement and the housing crisis. Anarchists contributed hugely to both the anti-nuclear struggle and the struggle for more affordable housing. In the peace movement, it was the anarchist concept of ‘direct action’ which inspired the ‘Committee of 100’ to take more militant action than the Campaign for Nuclear Disarmament (CND). Anarchists, such as the noted Freedom Contributor, Nicholas Walter, were also behind ‘Spies for Peace.’ And it was again anarchist ideas of direct action that inspired squatting as a response to the lack of affordable housing.

SDS spying on anarchists – What we know from Tranche 1

37. We know that anarchists from Freedom have been spied on for nearly 140 years. Registry Files were opened by Special Branch well before the SDS was even conceived. In respect of Freedom Press, the file RF/400/64/91 was opened in 1964, presumably after the previous one was full up. We do not have the date of the first file, but it may well be 1887. It is still unclear when in fact the Registry was set up, but it appears to have been operative in the 1920s.
38. Regarding individual anarchists associated with Freedom (who are now deceased), we note that Alan Albon had a file on him from 1945, John Rety from 1957, Arthur Moyses from 1960, Nicholas Walter from 1961, and Jim Huggon from 1964.
39. We can safely assume that prior to 1968 Special Branch used old fashioned methods of gathering intelligence without the need for employed UCOs. This would have meant scanning the anarchist press, talking to activists, meeting informers, operating surveillance on protestors, tapping phones etc. There was no obvious need when SDS was set up in 1968 to plant UCOs into Freedom. Special Branch already had ample intelligence.
40. Former DS Roy Creamer (HN3093) of SDS (later DI) had acquired “unrivalled knowledge of anarchists and anarchism.”¹⁵ He gave evidence during the Tranche 1 hearings that he felt the ‘old school’ method of the direct approach

¹⁵ See <https://www.ucpi.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2023/06/Undercover-Policing-Inquiry-Tranche-1-Interim-Report.pdf>

was adequate for the needs of Special Branch and that in 1968 he expected SOS (as SDS was then called) to be wound up. He was alert to the dangers of the use of long-term agents in deep cover, namely the tendency towards either *agent provocateur* activity, or what was later called 'Stockholm syndrome.' This is precisely why SDS's methodology was inherently dangerous and unreliable. The limits recommended by the creator of SDS, DCI Conrad Dixon, were almost immediately abandoned by the MPS hierarchy in favour of long-term penetration of radical groups for intelligence gathering purposes, much to the delight of MI5 who were given copies of every report via Box 500 and could and did make targeting requests. Anarchist groups were part of the initial targeting, although in 1968 they were seen as less politically significant than Trotskyists and Marxists who might sway the working class away from adherence to the 'loyal opposition' of the Labour Party and the less militant trade unions.

41. 'Doug Edwards' (HN326) was deployed into anarchist groups in 1968 and attended meetings of the West Ham Anarchists and Freedom Press. But it was not until 1974 that the Freedom Collective featured as a target in an SDS Annual Report.
42. 'Jim Pickford' (HN300), who although deceased has been given anonymity over his real name to protect the privacy of his family, had been deployed from late 1974 to December 1976. He spied not just on Freedom, but also on the Federation of London Anarchist Groups (FLAG) (of which Freedom was a member) and various anarchist groups in southwest London attached to the Anarchist Workers Association (AWA). He presented as short and stocky, with black hair and a beard, shaggy and unkempt. SDS had given him a vehicle of some sort. Some former comrades remember him as follows: "Really easy fellow to get on with. Took me in totally if he was guilty as charged... He picked up the jargon of the Group and used it to push his ideas. Jim was an enthusiast for anti-fascist activity." He often sold *Libertarian Struggle* (later renamed *Anarchist Worker*) and presented himself as a committed anarchist. He was also involved in at least distributing the newsletter of the 'Up Against the Law Collective' that was formed in the wake of the Angry Brigade trial in 1972 to assist individuals trying to overturn wrongful convictions. This is

another important theme of SDS spying, namely spying on legal advice and assistance given to their targets. In the case of Pickford, we have no further information. He also spied on one of the later Freedom directors, Ernest Rodker, who was a member of the Pavement Collective, a local community-based group in south London. Ernest is a pacifist anarchist and had been a founding member of CND and the Committee of 100 in the 1960s. He is a NSCP.

43. Pickford is also interesting in that he had, whilst undercover (and despite being in the middle of his second marriage) “fallen in love,” possibly with an activist, perhaps an anarchist, who he later, uniquely, went on to marry. That such relationships were being formed between Special Branch officers and female activists from so early on is noteworthy. It is now thought that he was withdrawn early from the field after just two years because his relationship was deemed to compromise the security of SDS. His love affair was reported by another UCO to management, and he was withdrawn. Did an anarchist lover conquer his heart and compromise the secret state? While it appears a possibility, we do not know whether the woman concerned was ever told by Pickford of his real job. She continued to call him Jimmy, but this could in any event be his real name as many SDS officers used their real first names in order not to be caught out. Pickford went on to continue his Special Branch career regardless. Although they had a child, the woman concerned, his third wife, eventually divorced him, moved abroad, and later re-married. The UCPI has, we understand, been unable to trace her. Pickford’s exit strategy was to pretend he had gone to Italy; he wrote to his AWA anarchist comrades, telling them of the struggles of the car factory workers.¹⁶
44. Aside from these intelligence reports, the UCPI has also heard from longstanding anarchist, Dave Morris. In his Opening Statement, Dave talked about how his involvement in anarchism began in 1975 with him attending Freedom meetings, before he went on to contribute to *Anarchy* magazine,¹⁷ being part of the collective which was infiltrated from early 1977 by SDS officer, ‘Graham Coates’ (HN304). Coates reported on six anarchist groups

¹⁶ This information is largely drawn from [https://powerbase.info/index.php/Jim/Jimmy_Pickford_\(alias\)](https://powerbase.info/index.php/Jim/Jimmy_Pickford_(alias)).

¹⁷ Second series, issues 1-38, 1971-1985 – see <https://libcom.org/article/anarchy-magazine-series-2>

between 1976 and 1979, including the Freedom Collective who he described as “wishful thinkers.”¹⁸ The other groups were Anarchy Collective, East London Libertarians, Persons Unknown, Zero Collective, London Workers Group, and Federation of London Anarchist Groups. Coates had asked SDS management that he be allowed to spy on anarchists, having found the International Socialist (IS) meetings “very dull.” He says that SDS were happy as “*they knew next to nothing*” about anarchist groups. Candidly, he states: “I think I was also drawn to the anarchists as I felt their unstructured and disorganised lifestyle might match my own lifestyle at the time.” In his live evidence, he confirmed he had “a fascination within me about the subject of anarchism” and “felt more at home” than he had in IS.”¹⁹ He effectively took over in the anarchist field from Pickford.

45. Other SDS officers also spied, tangentially, during this period on other anarchist groups: the Syndicalist Workers Federation (SWF), Rising Free Collective, Graffiti Collective, Anarcho-Utopian Mystics (AUM), the “Monday Club”, even Reading University Anarchists.²⁰

46. In his witness statement²¹, Coates states that:

“I challenged myself to integrate into the anarchist movement, and then into the Anarchy Collective (AC) by meeting [Privacy] and [Privacy]. Also, on one or two occasions, I met Albert Meltzer, who was the grandfather of the anarchist movement in the East End. He had flown the anarchist flag for decades and published an anarchist magazine called Black Flag. He did not come to any meetings of the AC, but I remember going with Dave Morris specifically to meet him in Whitechapel. I suppose you might call it a little vanity project.”

47. At paragraphs 87-102, Coates adds that he wrote occasionally for *Anarchy* magazine, just as Roger Pearce was to do for *Freedom*. There are four fairly

¹⁸ [HN304 Transcript of Oral Evidence](#) (p112, line 17)

¹⁹ See p97, p106 transcript of live evidence at https://www.ucpi.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2021/05/20210507-ucpi-t1_p2-evidence_hearings-transcript.pdf

²⁰ See https://www.ucpi.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2023/01/MPS_0728964.pdf

²¹ See <https://www.ucpi.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2021/04/MPS-0742282.pdf>

sparse intelligence reports on Freedom that appear to be his, dating from January 1977 to March 1979.²²

48. In the conclusion to his witness statement, Coates states that:

“I did not witness any public disorder whilst infiltrating the anarchists. The anarchists I reported on posed a minimal challenge to public order. They did not do much in the way of public demonstrations. Their numbers were small so, even if everyone in greater London who was prepared to call themselves a Libertarian or an anarchist had joined a demonstration, I doubt there would have been more than around 100 people. The anarchists did not even really discuss activities that would be a public order threat. Their threat was only based on anarchist history... The anarchists would... like to have thought themselves subversive. Their views were subversive to a conservative government, but they were not actively subversive. None of the anarchist groupings I reported on were significant in terms of numbers or even in terms of threat. The whole thing was riding on the tailcoats of the Angry Brigade in terms of what the MPS, the government and SB feared they were able to do. The grouping that had most potential was the Anarchy Collective because of its link to the Angry Brigade, and even they did not become subversive in their actions or what they achieved.”

49. MI5's Witness Z says that anarchists and ultra-left groups were considered a “threat” but did not become high priority until the mid-1970s. However, “anarchists, whilst all theoretically dedicated to the overthrow of any system of government, had only a few who were prepared to carry their beliefs beyond the bounds of lawful protest.”

50. F2C was the MI5 desk initially dealing with anarchists, but F4 dealt with running agents within the counter-subversion field. F7 was then created and took over the running of the anarchist desk. This was the desk who Roger Pearce dealt with in the early 1980s. Although MI5 declared that Special Branch should not have been running undercover agents in groups that only had a subversive and no public order threat, they clearly did.

²² See his witness statement para 92b, p29: UCPI0000017661, UCPI0000011576, UCPI0000013164, UCPI0000013269.

SDS Annual Reports – Anarchist groups spied on

51. The UCPI has disclosed SDS Annual Reports through to 1996. The Freedom Collective features in all of them from 1978 through to 1991, the period during which Margaret Thatcher was Prime Minister, and during which she identified “the enemy within” as clear political targets of the state.
52. The list of anarchist political groups spied on by SDS is lengthy:
 - ◆ Anarchy Collective
 - ◆ East London Libertarians
 - ◆ Persons Unknown
 - ◆ Zero Collective
 - ◆ London Workers Group (LWG)
 - ◆ Federation of London Anarchist Groups (FLAG)
 - ◆ Syndicalist Workers Federation (SWF)
 - ◆ Rising Free Collective
 - ◆ Anarcho-Utopian Mystics (AUM)
 - ◆ Monday Club (London School of Economics Anarchist Group)
 - ◆ Reading University Anarchists
 - ◆ Direct Action Movement (DAM)
 - ◆ London Weekly Collective
 - ◆ Autonomous Group (formerly LSE Monday Club)
 - ◆ Kronstadt Kids (formerly Autonomous Group)
 - ◆ North London Anarchist Group
 - ◆ Xtra!
 - ◆ A Distribution
 - ◆ Autonomy Centre
 - ◆ 121 Brixton Anarchist Bookshop and Collective
 - ◆ Belfast Anarchist Collective (BAC)
 - ◆ Black Flag
 - ◆ Anarchist Exchange
 - ◆ London Autonomists
 - ◆ Class War and Class War Federation (CWF)
 - ◆ South West and East London DAM
 - ◆ Anarchist Workers Group (AWG) and Association (AWA)
 - ◆ Anarchist Black Cross (ABC)

- ◆ Anarchist Forum
- ◆ Anarchist Workers Federation (AWF)
- ◆ Workers Action Group

53. Under the anarchist heading, SDS also included London Greenpeace, and many squatting and community groups on the basis that they tended to have “anarchist roots”: London Squatters Union (LSU), Brixton Squatters Aid, Hackney Squatters, Hackney Housing Action Group, Stamford Hill Squatters, Streatham Action Group, Free London Action Group, Haringey Community Action, Hackney Solidarity Group, Hackney Community Defence Association (HCDA) and Tower Hamlets Solidarity Group. SDS also added ‘Stop the City’ (1980s), numerous Anti-Poll Tax groups and the Trafalgar Square Defendants’ Campaign (early 1990s), the Campaign Against Police Repression (1994) and Reclaim the Streets (1996).
54. The SDS Annual Reports (from 1979) contained a short review of selected anarchist activity. For example, in 1980: “The Anarchists remain, as ever, unpredictable. Their numbers are, fortunately, small and it is hoped that their intention will be known, to a degree at least, to the SDS.” And, in 1981: “Though the anarchists kept a low profile during 1981, they are still a sinister and potentially dangerous faction having links with their counterparts on the Continent, and in Northern Ireland. Obviously, their activities should continue to be closely monitored.”
55. However, from 1991-1992, after the end of the Thatcher government, and as MI5 stepped back from counter-subversion to deal with Provisional IRA attacks on the British mainland, SDS Annual Reports no longer listed the groups penetrated. The reviews of anarchist activity were concentrated solely on the Class War group, before switching focus to community groups and campaigns against repressive laws. By the time of the Labour election victory in 1997, just after the end of the period under scrutiny in Tranche 2, SDS activity was focused away from strictly political anarchist groups and much more on animal rights, community groups and campaigns, and anti-fascism.

56. The last SDS Annual Report we have, for 1996-1997, highlighted the Security Service “policy decision to reduce its counter-subversion role, with no active investigations or operations at all in this field” and concluded: “this move effectively leaves it to the police to monitor political activism (from a public order standpoint).” The bracketed justification almost seems to come as an afterthought; the MPS were more than happy to continue to monitor political activism, as they had since the inception of Special Branch. In fact, within a couple of years, Roger Pearce, by now Commander of Special Branch, was, together with other colleagues in the British security apparatus, about to create a new national spying organisation, the National Public Order Intelligence Unit (NPOIU), which would hugely expand political surveillance, with hundreds of environmental and social justice campaign groups spied on. In a sinister move, the NPOIU was placed directly under the control of the Association of Chief Police Officers (ACPO) which was reconstituted in 1997 as a private company, and hence was not under the political control of the government. The secret state was being privatised.
57. In the SDS Annual Reports, there are a huge number of redactions in relation to groups spied on. This is completely unacceptable for what should be an open and public inquiry, and a measure of its failure. In relation to anarchist political groups, we have one in 1979, one in 1980, four in 1985, three in 1986, one in 1987, three in 1988, and four in 1990-1. In 1991-2, the entire list of anarchist groups spied on has been excised and concealed by the UCPI, under the insistence of MI5 and/or the MPS. It is fairly clear that one of these groups is Class War, due to the secrecy surrounding the SDS officer, Andy Bryant, during this period. With the deployment of Neil Richardson (HN122), Class War became the entire focus of the SDS Annual Reports for the next couple of years (until 1993), but we have no information about other anarchist groups. With the Class War split in 1993, Special Branch decided that “anarchism does not, for now, present any significant threat to public order or the security of the state” and only in 1994-1995 did SDS resume deployments, but on this basis: “Indications are that there is a rich seam of intelligence to be mined concerning the activities of lifestyle anarchists... involved in such issues as road building, opposition to the establishment and judicial system, and

serious anti-fascist violence.” So-called lifestyle anarchism had become a threat to the British state.

Roger Pearce ('Roger Thorley')

58. In the last decade, Roger Pearce has re-invented himself as a novelist, drawing on his experience as an SDS spy within the anarchist movement back in the early 1980s. He has written three novels to date, in which his protagonist and alter ego, 'DCI John Kerr', takes down some pantomime villains who happen to be grossly caricatured anarchists. His description of anarchist lairs is similar to both the Freedom premises in Angel Alley and the homes that he visited of Dave McCabe and Patrizia Giambi in Brixton. The importance of this, we say, is that there was always an element of fantasy about Pearce, a desire to 'sex up' his reports with lurid gossip and innuendo, character assassination, and a style of writing that would commend itself to his supervisors in MI5 and Special Branch.
59. Although he does not recall this, according to MI5's liaison note of 1 August 1980²³, Pearce "had himself suggested" spying on *The Leveller*, an independent collective of socialist and feminist journalists whose political magazine had exposed various unsavoury attributes of the British state. In 1978, they had published (along with *Peace News*) the name of Colonel Hugh Johnstone, Head of Signals Intelligence in the British Army, who gave evidence in the famous ABC case as 'Colonel B'. *The Leveller* was prosecuted for contempt of court by the Attorney General²⁴, despite the name being available from open sources. At the time, the existence of GCHQ in Cheltenham was a state secret. Insofar as Pearce, according to the MI5 liaison note, "wanted to write" for *The Leveller*, one wonders how he envisaged his role. Perhaps it was to write articles that allowed for further prosecutions for contempt? MI5, however, for their own reasons, decided there

²³ See UCPI0000028816

²⁴ In 1979, Duncan Campbell wrote that the Attorney General "had allowed himself to be used as a patsy for the security services to try to rearrange the law of official secrecy to their choosing. Several initiatives from that quarter had become apparent during the case." – See *Official Secrecy and British Libertarianism* by Duncan Campbell (The Socialist Register, 1979).

was no purpose in SDS running a further source in *The Leveller* collective. So, SDS, “as an alternative... had thought about the Freedom Collective.” After the MI5 liaison meeting, DCI Moss and DI Butler from SDS went to the MI5 bar (inside Curzon Street House) and were given the treat of “beer and sandwiches.” How jolly and casual was the decision to plant a spy into Freedom!

60. SDS asked MI5 to provide Pearce with a briefing about Freedom. Pearce recalls in his witness statement that there was advice from MI5 that they would value the targeting of anarchist groups, and SDS were also looking for “greater coverage of the anarchist field.”²⁵ Pearce also recalls that he went on a course on counter-subversion run by MI5.²⁶
61. Interestingly, there is nothing in his witness statement, or in any extraneous evidence, of Pearce receiving any training in relation to public order from A8 or any other department of Special Branch or the MPS. Nevertheless, Pearce, knowing that this is the only defence available to the MPS in its last-ditch attempt to justify the enormous scale of SDS spying, states that the “laser focus” of SDS was to “gather intelligence about public disorder”, adding that he “did not see anarchists as political campaigners.”²⁷ As if anarchism was not political! Pearce’s justifications are jumbled and an attempt to obscure the obvious truth.
62. It is clear to FFP that counter-subversion was the primary focus of the bulk of SDS reports, given this was always the primary role of both MI5 and Special Branch. The fact that the SDS Annual Reports and the letters seeking further funding from the Home Office state that the primary purpose of SDS was obtaining public order intelligence flies in the face of the overwhelming evidence, namely the intelligence reports of the UCOs which the Home Office never saw. The collateral reporting (almost all of which has been supposedly destroyed, if it ever existed) about public order was effective in giving plausible cover to the SDS’s concealed primary purpose. The fact that Special Branch

²⁵ See MPS-0747965, §44

²⁶ See MPS-0747965, §16

²⁷ See MPS-0747965, §55-57

provided routine threat assessments for police public order planning does not detract from the argument. SDS reporting was never primarily about upholding the Queen's Peace; it was about spying on the Queen's supposed domestic enemies. It would be quite wrong to take the MPS's self-proclaimed purpose at face value, as the UCPI Chairman appears to do at page 63 of his Tranche 1 Interim Report when he suggests that SDS intelligence provided to the Security Service was merely a "valuable by-product." In any event, the idea that SDS intelligence had any real impact on the major public order events of the day is fanciful. In Tranche 2, the UCPI will cover the period of the major riots and uprisings of the 1980s, none of which were predicted by SDS.

63. It is fairly obvious from one of the redacted sections of his witness statement that MI5 provided Pearce with logistical support in relation to driving licenses, false documentation, cover employment etc.²⁸ Witness Z confirms MI5 support.
64. It is well-known that there is a spider's web of former police, military and security employees across the UK who maintain links with their former employers – a sort of public-private partnership.
65. Pearce, using customary SDS tradecraft, stole the identity of a deceased 11-year-old child, Adrian Roger Thorley, who was tragically killed in a road accident, by going to St Catherine's House and obtaining a copy of his birth certificate. He then went to the child's hometown, Stoke-on-Trent, to build up his legend, even noting the child's primary school.²⁹
66. We have not been provided with a photo of Pearce in his undercover persona of 'Roger Thorley'. However, Pearce has provided us with a description of sorts, saying he was called 'Trotsky', presumably by those at Freedom, due to his appearance, although he does not mention sporting any round spectacles. Despite this, few Freedom old-timers can recall him, except for Dave McCabe.
67. Another interesting thing about Pearce is his very cosy interaction with the MI5 desk officer on the anarchist desk in F7, a woman with whom he went to a wine bar in Shepherds Market every month, as opposed to the pub in Curzon

²⁸ See MPS-0747965, §29

²⁹ See MPS-0747965, §30

Street where the MI5 male spooks used to hang out.³⁰ It is unclear why he had so many meetings with her, and how far these were sanctioned by his supervisors, either officially or unofficially. Witness Z's MI5 corporate witness statement³¹ discusses MI5 debriefing SDS officers, and the problems encountered, insofar as Geoffrey Craft (HN34 and Head of SDS from 1975 to 1977) apparently being reluctant to assist. One request that was cleared was for MI5 to discuss "ways into the Anarchist field in South London" with Pearce. The meeting took place on 20 December 1983. Pearce was due to end his deployment the following April in 1984. However, Witness Z says that "there had previously been an unofficial meeting with the agent in early August 1982, which had been facilitated by the Assistant Head."³² It was noted that such contact was against SDS policy. The MI5/SDS liaison file makes it clear that it was SDS policy for MI5 desk officers not to know the cover identities of SDS officers.³³ So, what was going on between Pearce and the female MI5 F7 desk officer?

68. In his Tranche 1 Interim Report, the UCPI Chairman found that the evidence showed a much closer relationship between MI5 and the SDS from 1979, after the election of Margaret Thatcher, and while David McNee (the Bible-thumping hard man from Glasgow) was MPS Commissioner. One wonders if this was a result of the traditional introductory meeting between the new Prime Minister and the Director General of MI5, at that time Sir Howard Smith. In any event, "from then on, regular discussions between the Head of section F6 (counter-subversion) and the DCI and DI in operational command of SDS took place, at which Security Service requests for intelligence were discussed...The relationship became even closer after the appointment of DCI Barry Moss in 1980 and DI Trevor Butler in 1981. Monthly meetings were held from February 1981 onwards." These managers were the immediate superiors of Roger Pearce.

³⁰ The Barley Mow pub on Horseferry Road appears to have been the favorite haunt of SDS, close to their office.

³¹ See UCPI0000034350

³² It is not quite clear whether this was DCI Dave Short or the DI (HN68).

³³ See UCPI0000028728

69. The MI5 'loose minute' dated 3 March 1981³⁴ requested specific information on anarchist activities in London, particularly at the 121 Bookshop on Railton Road in Brixton – who was involved, the layout of the premises, what was stocked, whether there was a telephone, and whether it appeared to be a successful venture. A request was made for information on the Direct Action Movement and the Anarchy Collective. It was Roger Pearce who was tasked with answering these requests, just one month before the Brixton riots on 11 to 13 April 1981.
70. What is clear is that while Pearce used his entry into Freedom to gain general access to anarchist groups, his direction of travel was away from Freedom in Whitechapel and down to Brixton and the anarchist groups associated with the 121 Bookshop. Sadly, the 121 Bookshop is not a NSCP in the UCPI, despite the extensive reporting on the Collective there.
71. While part of the Freedom Collective, Pearce wrote articles on two subjects: Northern Ireland and legal matters. His apparent expertise in the second subject, having a law degree from London University, enabled him to spy on meetings where legal advice was given and report back accurately about the legal strategies to be adopted by defendants or appellants like Dave McCabe and Patrizia Giambi.

Pearce: Exacerbating division

72. While undercover, Pearce positioned himself politically on the pro-Irish Republican side of the fence. By contrast, most members of the Freedom Collective were firmly sitting on the fence in respect of this issue. This was a deliberate ploy, and Pearce used it to draw closer politically to those who shared the same view of unconditional but critical support for Irish Republicanism.
73. His "Prisoners of Politics" article in *Freedom*³⁵ argues for the Irish Republican prisoners who had started a hunger strike in 1980 being given political status.

³⁴ See UCPI0000029199

³⁵ "Prisoners of Politics" (*Freedom*, Vol 41, No 22, 8/11/80)

On 9 April 1981, one of those on hunger strike, Bobby Sands, was elected MP for Fermanagh and South Tyrone. When he died on 5 May 1981, there was a huge outpouring of public sympathy, and the political mobilisation that followed prompted the Freedom visit to the Belfast Anarchist Collective at the end of May 1981. Pearce took this opportunity to solidify his link to a more pro-Irish Republican position. On 4 July 1981, Pearce managed to get the front page of *Freedom* for his article, "The Not So Distant Struggle." He would have known that this article would stir up a hostile reaction from many in the Freedom Collective, and he was able to exacerbate divisions. We posit that there was always an overarching brief for UCOs and intelligence agents to sow division if need be.

74. Pearce increasingly used his political cover to get closer to anarchists who he thought were more involved in direct action than the Freedom Collective, particularly the anarchists around the 121 Bookshop in Brixton. He began to attend 121 Collective meetings, and after the Brixton riots of April 1981, this gave him the opportunity to spy on those arrested and charged, and their lawyers.

Pearce: Breaching legal professional privilege

75. There is no separate category for lawyers spied on by SDS in the UCPI, but from the intelligence reports disclosed so far, we know that Special Branch had Registry files on many of the most well-known defence lawyers of the period, Benedict Birnberg, Privacy, Ian Macdonald and Geoffrey Robertson to name but a few. Defence lawyers are likely to have been targets of MI5 interest and subject to technical and human surveillance by both MI5 and Special Branch. Indeed, the entire firm of Birnberg & Co had its own Registry file. It is unclear whether all the lawyers who worked for this firm were deemed worthy of having files opened on them, or whether this depended on the clients they represented or the meetings they attended. However, they do appear to have been spied on not as political activists but as lawyers, despite the fact that they clearly did not represent either a public order threat or a threat to parliamentary democracy and the state.

76. The lawyers who were used by many anarchists at the time, whether members of the Freedom Collective or other groups, were spied on as well. It is unclear what, if any, justification there was for this. It is also unclear whether the UCPI will deal with this issue, beyond the issue of breach of legal professional privilege.
77. Roger Pearce, having positioned himself politically in 1980 as an Irish Republican sympathiser, began attending meetings of the 121 Bookshop in Brixton. He used his comrade from Freedom, Dave McCabe, to facilitate his entry, by driving them together to the bookshop at the weekend.
78. Pearce had already claimed, as part of his undercover identity, to have knowledge of legal matters, and wrote for *Freedom* on legal topics. He was, therefore, in an ideal position, when it came to arrests and defence campaigns arising out of the Brixton riots in 1981, to attend and record the content of legal advice. By putting this in detail in his reports, he knew that it would be disseminated from C Squad to the appropriate sections of the MPS. As we only have the Box 500 copies from MI5, we do not know to whom else Pearce's reports were disseminated. The MPS have conveniently destroyed almost their entire archive, no doubt to avoid institutional embarrassment and corporate liability.
79. In his witness statement, Pearce states that while he carefully recorded the detailed legal advice given by lawyers to defendants, this was not a breach of legal professional privilege as the advice was given in a meeting that was not confidential to the client. This is entirely disingenuous, as the lawyers were obviously unaware that he was a police spy who was reporting back directly to the very same organisation that was prosecuting their clients. Pearce states that the main lawyer in question, as well as the defendants themselves, would have treated him as a 'trusted friend.'
80. Pearce, SDS, Special Branch and MI5 had not the slightest concern about breaching legal professional privilege. It is almost certain that the lawyers' phones were tapped as well. The strategy was all about spying on the lawyers to give an unfair advantage to the prosecution by recording privileged legal communications between lawyers, their clients and supporters.

81. However, it does not end there. In the case of the Brixton riots in 1981, the Thatcher government and the MPS had a direct interest in covering up the truth about the reasons for the riots, not just the obvious trigger, namely the MPS's Operation Swamp, but also the surrounding circumstances of economic deprivation, racial discrimination and racist policing. Special Branch were, therefore, tasked to assist in providing a false narrative that would enable both the Thatcher government and the MPS to get off the hook and falsely blame the events on anarchists (and, in keeping with their overall institutional racism and xenophobia, foreign anarchists).
82. Pearce's assessment was that the involvement of anarchists in Brixton was no more than a few joining in what had already started. In other words, anarchists were not instigators. This was also the assessment reached in the SDS Annual Report of 1981. However, this was not the narrative provided to the media who were extensively briefed by Special Branch, as is clear from the contemporary press reporting. Pearce, therefore, would have known that the briefings were false, but that this was perfectly acceptable as it was all part of a political struggle, and he was a political policeman, loyal to the cause. His reporting on Jean Weir and Patrizia Giambi wrongly linked them to the Italian Marxist-Leninist armed group, the Red Brigades (Brigate Rosse). It was this link which was fed to the press in an undoubted attempt to convict both through sheer prejudice generated by Special Branch and deployed by the Metropolitan Police prosecutor in court.
83. Jean Weir was fortunate to be acquitted at trial, as her lawyer was able to summons a BBC reporter who gave evidence that undermined the police evidence of identity. But poor Patrizia Giambi, a young schoolteacher on leave from her job in Italy, who had come to learn English in London, was made to pay the price, being sent to prison on fabricated evidence, with political and xenophobic prejudice deployed against her in full.
84. Pearce got close to both women and their lawyer by attending meetings about their cases and reporting on the legal advice they received to his superiors. He did nothing to alert his bosses that the supposed link to the Red Brigades was untrue. In fact, Special Branch appears to have opened a file on the Red Brigades around the same time. Did MI5 know better? Did they not brief

Pearce in one of his regular wine bar meetings? Or was it the case that this was deliberate misinformation recorded against the women for political reasons?

85. The same thing happened to Dave McCabe who was the victim of police brutality by the notorious Special Patrol Group (SPG) in Brixton and spying by his supposed comrade, 'Roger Thorley.' Dave had the same outcome, being wrongly sent to prison by a Magistrate on a similar charge as Patrizia Giambi.
86. Pearce played an important part in these wrongful convictions through his spying activity and reporting the legal advice given, in detail, back to Special Branch for deployment by the police prosecutor in court. He knew that Dave and Patrizia were innocent, but his political loyalty to the Branch outweighed any sense of justice. One final clue we have about these Special Branch manipulated prosecutions is in "A Case for Protest"³⁶, Pearce's article in *Freedom*, in which he suggests that Stipendiary Magistrate Nicholls was widely believed "to have 'close links' with Special Branch prosecutors."
87. Dave McCabe's and Patrizia Giambi's convictions were miscarriages of justice and should be quashed.

Conclusions

88. In his Tranche 1 Interim Report of June 2023, the UCPI Chairman refrained from expressing any view "*about the proposition that the SDS was one of the instruments set up by a conservative state to suppress the aspirations of those who wished to produce radical change by political means.*" We say that this is self-evidently the case. Any state will defend itself similarly, and the British state continues to do so, with or without agencies or instruments like the SDS.
89. Anarchists believe that their ideas are genuinely subversive of the existing order. Having said that, *Freedom* was effectively a propaganda factory for ideas, whose principal aim was to keep in print the anarchist classics, run a bookshop and print a fortnightly newspaper. *Freedom* operated above all in the realm of ideas – ideas which the political police wanted to stop spreading.

³⁶ <https://freedomnews.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2018/03/Freedom-articles-by-RT-1980-81.pdf>

Special Branch was initially set up to combat anarchism and has continued that fight over the last 140 years. Of course, Freedom has been raided on numerous occasions, had editors and writers jailed, seen its fair share of fabricated prosecutions, and been spied on throughout. That is what the British state does.

90. But Freedom was never a real threat to the British state or parliamentary democracy. Nor were any of the anarchist groups who were spied on. It took until the early 1990s for the Security Service to step back from counter-subversion in order to concentrate on serious matters. However, this left the field wide open to Special Branch who increased their surveillance and whose Commanders, notably Pearce, helped set up a national spying organisation, the National Public Order Intelligence Unit (NPOIU). And with the huge expansion of technological surveillance via GCHQ, we now have a vast spying apparatus in the UK that can spy, at will, in live time, on almost every British citizen. This is a far worse situation for civil liberties than in 1968 when SDS was founded.

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