

# WAS MY FRIEND A **SPYCOP?**



A guide to investigating suspicions  
and providing emotional support  
**UNDERCOVER RESEARCH GROUP**

# **WAS MY FRIEND A SPY COP?**

## **A GUIDE TO INVESTIGATING SUSPICIONS AND PROVIDING EMOTIONAL SUPPORT**

At *Undercover Research Group* we are regularly approached by individuals and groups who suspect someone in their group may be an undercover police officer. They usually hope we can confirm these suspicions, but unfortunately it is never that simple: there is no public database of undercover officers, and finding proof is a long process of research and elimination—even when the evidence against them is substantial.

So far, almost every successful investigation into an undercover officer has started with a group of people who knew the officer. In these cases the first step was for the group to share and discuss concerns. Over the years we have seen a variety of good and bad practice, but the important thing is that group of people has control over the process—that it starts and ends with them. The *Undercover Research Group* can help with the bit in the middle, giving advice and doing the more specialist research.

As we constantly tell people, it is not enough to have suspicions—*suspicions alone never justify spreading rumours or making public statements about individuals*. If you have well-founded suspicions then the onus is on you to investigate first and then to provide solid evidence to back up your claims. People who make unfounded allegations without doing the necessary groundwork need to be called out for being disruptive and offensive. Unchecked, this behaviour leads to the destruction of groups and can cause personal harm.

In this pamphlet we provide some tips, guidelines and advice on potential pitfalls to help get you started on an investigation—much is best practice that has developed over the last decade. (Note: in places it assumes a UK based model of undercover policing which may not be applicable in other countries).

# GETTING STARTED

## Where do your suspicions come from?

This may seem an unusual point to raise, but asking where and when the suspicions started is a good starting point. We don't suspect an individual for the sake of it, rather there are reasons why there is a niggles, a sense of something odd. As activists we don't just develop our campaigning skills, we also develop a sense of the people around us. Most suspicions start out this way—perhaps it's a dress sense that is not quite right or comes across as contrived, a sense that an individual's politics are weaker than expected, a lack of passion that does not match actions or simply that they are an odd person who doesn't quite fit.

Don't forget, protest movements attract all sorts of personalities and concerns at this level will never be enough, and very probably be misplaced. But it is useful to acknowledge when those concerns began.

Another form of suspicion comes from hindsight. Perhaps things have gone unexpectedly wrong, or there have been particular patterns of disruption. Or, as is more often the case with historical police undercovers, a realisation that a former comrade fits the now established pattern just a bit too well—even though that person might have been a great activist who you did lots of actions, including illegal stuff, and while you knew them you would have sworn they weren't a cop. Whatever suspicions you have, they are a valid starting point. But the thing to remember is that is exactly what they are: a start.

How you go from here is the important bit.

## Don't just assume you are right!

Be prepared to be proven wrong. If questions have been raised about someone's behaviour or background that doesn't prove they're an undercover officer. There are many legitimate reasons for people to hide their background, act strangely or to vanish altogether. It is far more important that you enter the process with an open mind and are prepared to be proven wrong.

It is always better to be able to clear someone of suspicion than it is to confirm your worst fears. *Approach investigations with the assumption that it is better to have a positive outcome and be wrong, than to immediately assume the worst.*

To begin investigations with the firm belief that someone is a cop when they actually aren't will cause you to attempt the impossible: to prove a negative, and potentially destroy someone's reputation in the process. Sometimes the reason no evidence can be found is that there isn't any.

## **Be prepared to never find answers**

Undercover policing is naturally a very secretive world, and great efforts are made to keep it that way. There's no magic wand to provide straightforward answers—the current exposure of the undercover policing scandal is the exception rather than the rule. We went for many decades without ever having firm evidence or clear answers, and in many cases answers have never been found (and may never be)—even after years of campaigning, litigation and official apologies.

## **Be a group—listen to each other**

We rarely start investigations on the word of a single person. On the other hand, in our experience, suspicions are generally worth considering when several people have raised concerns independently of each other. This approach also avoids the situation where one person manages to persuade others that weak suspicions constitute definitive proof. Investigations also tend to work much better when people are able to consider their suspicions collectively.

In a group, natural checks and balances are in place: an action or event that may seem suspicious to one person may have a natural explanation when accounted for by another with more complete knowledge of the event or person.

Once a group starts investigating it is important that there is an agreed set of guidelines right from the start: who else can be told? how are you going to keep material confidential? what you are going to do if proven wrong / right? etc.

Being in a group can also help people to deal with the emotional difficulties of working through this kind of investigation—after all, digging into the life of someone you considered a good friend is never going to be easy. Because of this aspect it may be useful to bring into the process someone who is trusted but who did not know the individual in question and who can act as a sounding board. They can have several roles such as keeping the process on track and allowing people to work through emotions by lifting some of the responsibilities, or even helping call an end to the investigation if it is not working out.

An equally important task is that of challenging assumptions and considering evidence critically, e.g. by helping the group to avoid assuming it has more proof than it actually has and of jumping to wrong conclusions.

It is possible to work through the process on your own—this has been done. But in cases where individuals have done the work, many have told us they'd have much preferred to have had a group around them.

## Be alert to burn-out

Burn-out is, sadly, quite common in these situations. This is neither widely recognised or properly addressed.

Burn-out is often associated with a sense of having lost control. This in turn leads to a loss of perspective and seeing threats all around. As a result, paranoia is a common manifestation, leading to witch-hunts against anyone who ever said something out of place, or acted a bit differently.

It can be a fine line between acting on gut-feelings and reacting to ungrounded paranoia. This is yet another reason why a group process is generally preferable since the symptoms of burn-out can be recognised and support provided.



# INVESTIGATING SUSPICIONS

## 1. Write down your suspicions

This is a short step, but one that shouldn't be underestimated. If you suspect someone, take the time to write down the reasons for your suspicions. This helps to focus and clarify what is bothering you. It also helps you evaluate the substance of your fears and to present your concerns to others.

## 2. Evaluating initial suspicions: The 15 Questions

The Special Demonstration Squad and the National Public Order Intelligence Unit were active for forty years, and during this time they were remarkably consistent in the techniques used while undercover in political and campaign groups. By profiling known undercovers from these departments we have been able to reconstruct a large part of the manual the police used, which gives us some idea of what to look for: the 'tells' that have given away undercovers.

The understanding we have gained of their tradecraft has been distilled into 15 basic questions (See **15 Questions We Work With** in the appendix).

You can apply these questions to the person you suspect, or even use them as a starting point. If the person matches two-thirds or more of the questions, then your suspicions are probably well grounded—but further, more in-depth research will be required to turn these suspicions into something more concrete.

NB because of changes to training and deployment of undercover policing and intelligence gathering the 15 Questions are less likely to be useful for undercovers deployed after January 2011.

## 3. Organising your material

Once you have a working group, repeat point 1 but this time together with the other people in your group. Pool knowledge, compare notes. Again, it may be helpful to log, in writing, everything you know about the person in question, particularly what gave rise to the suspicions in the first place. The aim is to see the bigger picture and to add clarity to your suspicions.

As the investigation develops you will gather a lot of information and you will need to find ways to manage this.

- *Organise information clearly*, by topic for instance. Spend some time finding out and documenting what you heard and from whom, even if people do not want to be publicly named as a source. In one case, several rumours about a person were traced back to another individual—who turned out to be an undercover.
- *Evaluate the credibility of sources*. Newspaper articles often get details wrong, and people may have personal grudges which colour their memories.

- *Draw up timelines, maps, lists of contacts, events and places the person may have been.* Look for gaps in the chronology of events and make a list of those who may be able to help fill the gaps. Knowing clearly what you have and what you still need to investigate, especially when working in a group, is essential.

Remember: **keep your material secure**—consider the appalling impact this material could have if it were disclosed and the person you are investigating is actually innocent!

#### 4. Next stages

If you've covered the points above then you'll be in a position to start confirming or disproving your suspicions.

This stage is forensic in nature, investigating every aspect of the person's own account of themselves, looking for clues and inconsistencies. You want to establish whether the identity they presented you with is real—are you are dealing with an undercover police officer using a fake identity?

You may find it useful to go through the profiles of previous undercovers to give yourselves an idea of what sort of details you're looking for. But remember, every case is different and some aspects carry more weight than others.

In pre-2000 cases, you may be looking for the death certificate of a child who shares the same name and birthday as your suspect (as this may point to a stolen identity). Other research may include working out how much the persona actually exists outside the group they are active in and whether their back story is genuine. You could try to confirm their existence in birth records, that they went to the schools they said they did, and so on.

Birthdays are always important for this, and to a lesser degree, accounts of their childhood and family. It is not unusual for undercovers to incorporate bits from their 'real' life to flesh out their story, though the degree to which these real life snippets are helpful varies a lot; in previous cases the real life details have provided invaluable clues, while at other times they were of little assistance. It's hard to tell in advance what may help, so it's best to make a record of absolutely everything. Often it is a slow process of eliminating possibilities. In several cases, to prove that someone was not who they said they were we went through the exercise of identifying everyone with the same name and in the right birth range (although this is much harder to do if the suspect has a common name) in order to show that our suspect didn't exist.

In the jargon you are trying to determine if they are a 'ghost'—someone with all the appearances of existing, but who vanishes when you try to touch their past. Much of this can be facilitated by access to specialist knowledge and resources; this is the point where the *Undercover Research Group* is most likely to be of help (see [www.UndercoverResearch.net/1082-2](http://www.UndercoverResearch.net/1082-2)).

## 5. Bring others into the group

Once you have reached a point where you believe your suspicions need further action, the chances are you are going to have to talk to others who knew the person. This stage can require great care, the people being approached need to be made aware of any group agreement, and the delicacy of the investigations. Be prepared for new people to be angry, shocked or in denial; prepare the meeting well to avoid your concerns being dismissed out of hand, or, conversely, to avoid attempts to expose the suspect without further investigation.

Make sure new people are given space and support to process the news. At this stage you need to make it clear that this is still an investigation that has not come to any specific conclusions, and they should abide by any confidentiality agreement. Just because there is smoke, it doesn't mean there is fire.

Sensitivity is needed when telling people who had close friendships or relationships with the individual being investigated—everyone reacts differently and you cannot always predict which way it will go. However, one of the things that should set us apart from the police and state is that we have a sense of our duty of care to our comrades, even when there are political differences. Something you should consider at this point is preparing the support that may be needed both for yourselves and for others. (See **Support Each Other** below.)

Discuss your individual needs in your group, and keep everyone up to date with who is doing what. Get a sense of how much people want to contribute. Some will want to be involved in every aspect, others may be concerned that the investigation does not distract too much from current political activities, but still share an interest in what is decided. Also, be actively aware of issues in the group such as balancing competing needs for privacy and taking action, and the risk of burn-out.



## RESULTS OF THE INVESTIGATION

It is probable that you won't get any definitive results to your investigation. Absolute certainty about undercover officers has only been found when activists found out their real name, mostly because of mistakes made by the spycops. Mark Kennedy returned as a corporate spy after he left the police and used a passport in his real name when going abroad. Carlo Neri registered under his real name at one of the addresses he used. In other cases, undercovers let slip details that gave away their real name. More often than not, it has come down to luck and sloppiness on behalf of the undercover officers on the one hand, and persistence in following up every possible lead on the other—a process that can take years.

Below we've listed the several possible outcomes of investigations:

### **Being proven wrong**

If you are lucky you'll be able to remove suspicion from the individual in question. But it's not enough to reach this conclusion then call it a day. For starters you'll need to pass on your conclusions to any others you have spoken to—it is wrong to destroy a person's reputation by insinuation or by allowing rumours to persist.

You'll also need to decide whether to tell the person or not. For some people, this degree of openness is important, but the individual concerned may naturally take it very badly. Other groups have decided to simply not mention the investigation, which can have the downside that the story may linger on—depending on how many people knew of the suspicions the subject may crop up again.

Remember, material you have assembled may, if it falls into the wrong hands, be used against the individual in question—so destroy it, particularly if you are tending towards believing your suspicions were probably groundless.

### **Really not sure**

The world of undercover policing, informers and corporate spies is by its very nature murky. It is populated by professionals who go to great lengths to hide their activities, and to build cover. Add to this the fact that many of us have legitimate reasons to not always be completely open about our backgrounds and personal histories, and that our movements have a culture of respect for each other's privacy and you have a situation where it's hard to recognise an undercover.

If you have suspicions about a person who is or was in your group then you should recognise that the chances are you'll never know whether or not those suspicions are groundless. It may be that you are looking in the wrong direction entirely: someone else in the group may be the issue (perhaps spreading rumours to secure their cover), perhaps group members are being careless about security, or your group may be subject to a high level of surveillance technology.

If you're in this situation then it's often best to park your suspicions for the time being, or even to completely let go of them. Instead you could approach the issue from different directions: consider what it is that your group does and what are the risks to taking such action? Are leaks actually preventing your group from continuing to seek political change by your chosen methods?

We'd suggest that a good approach is to be aware of your security needs and to tighten things up on that front. Have an open and honest debate about what the likely threats to your work may be, and what measures you can take to counter them. Good processes can actually go a long way to preventing any infiltrator from doing much damage, for example smaller affinity groups may use positive vetting of members to reduce the risk of infiltration, while other groups choose to focus on openness as a tactic in itself, making the potential presence of an infiltrator irrelevant.

### **Almost but not quite**

In most situations, you will never be 100% certain that someone was an undercover. Attempts to seek answers from the police, outside of actually taking them to court (and even then there's no guarantee), are likely to fail, or to be met with 'Neither Confirm Nor Deny' statements.

Which leaves you with the unpleasant choice of what to do next. In the context of the Public Inquiry into Undercover Policing, the *Undercover Research Group* and others have released information on undercovers for whom, although there was no definitive proof, there was sufficient circumstantial evidence to confirm their status. In these cases we acknowledged the residual doubt by limiting the information we released—depending on the evidence available, we took decisions not to publish photos, full cover names, etc.

### **If you are right ... historic undercovers**

If you have found definitive evidence—the 'smoking gun'—or circumstantial evidence that is too significant to ignore then you will need to consider the next stages with care. There is almost always a case to be made for going public as most undercover officers were active in more groups and movements than we initially realise—disparate groups may be affected and should know about the case.

Going public with your information requires sensitivity. There are a number of steps you should take:

- a) *Forewarn those you know who had connections with the undercover.* This might not always be possible, but it's only fair to make an effort. It is horrible to discover a former lover or friend was an undercover by suddenly seeing their picture on the web or in newspapers.
- b) *Consider whose anonymity needs to be protected* and ensure that all who knew the undercover are informed of the need to not betray certain personal details, such

as the real names of people involved, without permission—something particularly true for those who had been lovers of undercover. In the current context of the Public Inquiry, you may need to give time for those who had relationships to get anonymity orders, especially where there is likely to be strong media interest.

- c) *Prepare a profile of the undercover*, clearly setting out the evidence. It is bad practice to make allegations without publicising the reason why you are doing so, as this leads to doubt and confusion, not to mention mistrust and paranoia. It is also good practice to detail the activities the undercover was involved in so others can place them in context—memories of names and faces can fade, so help people to work out who you are talking about.
- d) *Consider how you are going to publish the profile*, and how much material you are going to release to back up your story. Questions and controversy will quickly emerge if you say an activist was a police officer without presenting any evidence to support the claim.

Depending on the nature of the story, you may want to consider approaching the mainstream media. If you do, make sure they are aware of which aspects of the case they need to be discreet about, particularly in protecting the identities of people who were targeted. Mainstream media has its own issues—they can be very conservative when it comes to standards of proof, and you need to make sure you work with journalists who understand your needs and the emotional effect this sort of thing can have on people, especially where there were close relationships with the undercover. The media must be prepared to respect people's privacy—if in any doubt, contact us for advice.

- e) *Don't use people's real names without their permission*, and it is best practice, even when using aliases, to get people to sign off on how they were quoted.
- f) It is very important you *handle this well in your own group*, and have support in place for those who are going to be the most affected by the fall-out. If you are working in the UK, please get in touch as we may be able to direct you to helpful resources
- g) Likewise, *discourage macho responses*, or those of the 'I knew all along' kind—these are never helpful, especially for those most affected. Simply dissing the undercover can also have its negative effects on those trying to get their head round how a long term lover betrayed them so completely—remember, they may be already struggling with a lot of self-doubt because of what they've just found out, this kind of thing can take years to resolve. For more on understanding the impact of exposing undercover and cushioning the impact, please see the Police Spies Out Of Lives website: [www.policespiesoutoflives.org.uk](http://www.policespiesoutoflives.org.uk)

## **If you are right ... in the here and now**

What should you do if you discover an undercover or other kind of infiltrator in your midst in the here and now?

In acute cases you should prioritise the investigation—you need to act fast to prevent more damage being done. You will need to be discreet, as in these circumstances there is not just the danger of spreading paranoia, but also the risk of the person in question learning about the suspicions. If this happens, it will in all likelihood lead to them covering their tracks, and they may well disappear before you can confront them.

Be alive to the fact that any investigation, regardless of the outcome, can damage the networks of trust within a group. This will be an issue, particularly post-exposure, if some people feel excluded from the process and angry that they didn't have the chance to have an input on decisions.

Once the investigation is finished—and again, having 100% definitive proof is rare—your group may have to work hard in order to re-establish trust between members. Experience has shown that a good way to approach a situation where you have proof that you are dealing with a live undercover is to organise a meeting between them and the investigating group. Take care to avoid letting them know the purpose of the meeting beforehand since the aim is to challenge the undercover directly and give them a chance to respond. This way you can gauge their reaction to the challenge, which can be a way of testing your hypothesis that they are an undercover—particularly useful if you are still looking for conclusive proof.

If you go down this route, it is important that you are ready to tell others about the situation—have the dossier ready for distribution immediately after the meeting. A freshly exposed undercover can do serious personal damage on their way out. The shock of discovery can split a group if evidence is not readily available to demonstrate why an investigation was carried out. Similarly the undercover may seek to turn the wider group or movement against the investigating team, or use their departure as a way to cause friction and infighting.

## **Undercover Cop or something else?**

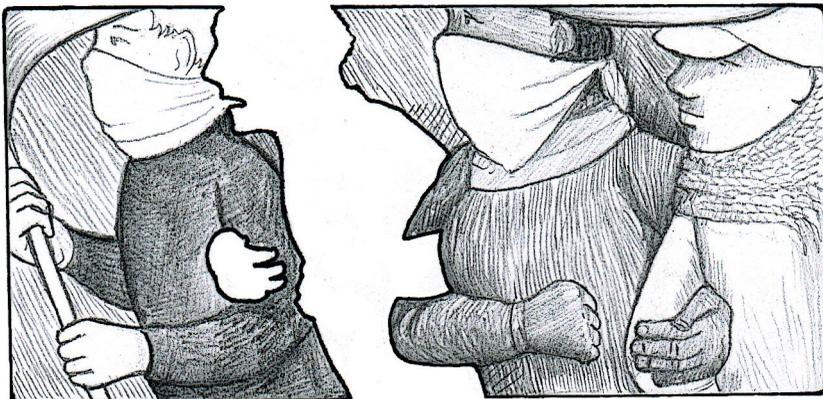
Undercover officers are—still—relatively rare. However, too often people are sloppy in their language, and consider informers, corporate spies, secret service agents and even undercover journalists as the same thing. While their aims may be similar, their *modus operandi* are considerably different.

For instance, police generally never use their real surname and have a limited time undercover (the longest known is 6 years). So someone who is involved longer than that, or can be shown to be known by that surname for a longer time, has a much lower likelihood of being an undercover police officer

An informer or grass is someone who is already active in activist circles and who has agreed to pass on information to the police. Sometimes this is because they have found themselves in a position that the police have been able to exploit (blackmail), and once you have been trapped into talking the police won't let go. In other cases it may be because some part of an individual's personality likes to be able to play all sides—we know of some informers who have made the initial approach to the police. The difficulty with an informer is that as someone who is already part of the scene they are much more in tune with it and are less likely to make the same cultural mistakes that police undercovers do.

Corporate spies are specifically hired by intelligence corporations to infiltrate groups on behalf of clients. These spies often have a strong police or military connection. Corporate spies do not usually have the daily handling and in-depth preparation which can dramatically improve the chances of successful infiltration. However, we know of other, long-term corporate spies who were successful in infiltrating various groups for many years, some on behalf of the police.

Though many of the techniques for an investigation overlap, there are many differences in approach which we have not covered in this publication, but will address elsewhere. Thus, during an investigation you need to be alert to these different possibilities, as different kinds of evidence will be needed depending on what manner of beast you are dealing with. There are far more informers and corporate spies around than there ever were undercover police officers. Being alert to this, and being prepared to change tack is a sign of a healthy process.



# SUPPORT EACH OTHER

*Please do not underestimate the importance of supporting each other!*

Support will be needed throughout the process—investigating and uncovering a spycop is not without deep emotional cost. The state, the abusers in all this, provide psychological support for undercovers, and we should be at least as aware of the issues. Make sure, at all stages of the process, that you are considering the emotional needs of those affected, including those in the investigating group. Where investigations haven't worked so well it is often because they have fallen down on precisely this issue, adding further damage to that done by the police.

## **Dos and don'ts of providing emotional support**

In the unpleasant world of investigating undercovers, trust, both in oneself and in how you view others, is one of the first things to be lost. So, at the heart of any emotional support, trust will be central, followed by access to people who can give understanding, both politically and emotionally. One of the strongest things we have is group unity. It creates space for people to come together and be mutually supported by those who share the same politics and experiences of campaigning. Everyone reacts in different ways, even if the case being investigated happened a long time ago. Reaction can depend on where an individual is now in their lives as well as what happened when the undercover was in their lives.

A very common reaction is a sense of loss of control, and of doubting one's own judgement. After all, if you can let someone deceive you so much, who and what else were you wrong about? Thus, it is very important that those needing emotional support have a sense they are in control of decisions which affect them. Having facts ready and accessible can make a big difference to how people process the information you've uncovered. People will want to know that the reasons for the outing is based on substance and not just speculation—having access to facts is a factor in helping people process what has happened since it addresses doubt early on, rather than allowing it to fester. Set out your processes carefully and make space for people to ask questions.

The following points do not just apply to those who had intimate relationships with undercovers; trust and friendship are equally powerful forces and we should not forget how others can be damaged by the discovery that a trusted friend was a spycop.

- *Be aware that people who were very close to the officer may find it hard to accept the deception, and can take a long time to feel any anger towards the person they were deceived by. The manipulation of their emotions has been very complex. It may be hard for them to hear negative talk about the undercover officer.*

- *Acknowledge that undercover (and their support team) are experts at deception* who deliberately prey on activists' emotions. Saying it was obvious at the time undermines those who were deceived by making them feel stupid.
- *Gather together the people who were close to an officer* to digest and debrief the evidence—this can be a very helpful way for people to process the news.
- Be aware that *not all intimate relationships are public knowledge*, even within the group.
- *Avoid dismissing someone's experience*—a one-night stand can have as much impact as a year long relationship—it all depends on the context for that person. There is no hierarchy of abuse. Don't divide up how people respond along gender lines.
- *If people have had intimate relationships with undercover officers, they will probably need ongoing support to come to terms with this.* People who knew them and the officer are best placed to provide support, but making contact with other people in a similar situation can also be cathartic. Support groups like *Police Spies Out of Lives* can help.
- *Just because someone is not saying much, it does not mean they are not affected.* Give space to everyone, not just the loudest.
- When bringing others into the group, *remember that everyone will have changed* to different degrees since the time in question. This will bring extra histories that may need to be considered, especially where emotional trauma is an issue, and extra layers of safety may need to be considered. For example, where members of the group have had to deal with domestic violence situations. This can also be a very empowering experience for people, to rebuild old friendships and to find strength in a collective, inclusive process.
- Depending on the situation, it *may be best to pass on any information in person.* Someone who is in an isolated situation away from like-minded people is not likely to react well to a phone-call out of the blue and then being left to deal with the situation alone. Do not let people who were close to the officer find out on the grapevine or in the press.
- *Give people space to vent and be angry*, though be aware that it is not always appropriate to sound off: angry damning of the undercover may have a negative effect on people already feeling shaky or struggling to process the revelation. Likewise, avoid macho and aggressive responses. It's all about finding the right balance and the right space: it can be a good idea to set up a different space afterwards (e.g. after a facilitated, formal meeting, there could be a trip to the pub for a more informal, looser set of reactions).
- Accept people may initially shoot the messenger. Some people will need space to grieve and rebuild important memories that are now tainted.

- *Be ready for people to be upset if they were not invited to be part of the investigating group*, and to have answers why they weren't. This may become a significant focal point in the aftermath if not handled well.
- Try to *put aside old political and personal disagreements*; they can exacerbate the situation and distract from the real problem in this case.
- *Don't railroad decisions*: people will need to feel their needs are being heard, and they should be given space to input into discussions. The story and effect of an infiltrator is rarely, if ever, owned exclusively by one group of people.
- *Be prepared for how the investigation may affect how you view and react to people*. Often people underestimate the personal impact of conducting an investigation.
- *Respect people's wishes and privacy*. People handle these situations differently: for example, some people may not want to know, or they may have too much going on in their lives to be able to deal with all the fall out.
- Finally, taking *legal action against those running the undercover is an important option for some*. Work out whether and how much support you want to give to such a process.

## **Supporting someone who had a relationship with an undercover**

If you are supporting someone left in a vulnerable situation after discovering they were in a relationship with an undercover officer there are a number of practical steps you can take:

- Form a group of supportive people around the person*. Check in on them regularly, and be in it for the long-haul.
- Approach the situation knowing that they will need to feel in control* of their choices. Avoid removing their sense of agency.
- Listen*. Sometimes they will need to tell their story again and again in order to process it. Make a list with them of people they can contact if they need to talk or have a wobble.
- Help them identify appropriate counselling or therapy* (see **Resources** below).
- Help them take action*—find a solicitor if necessary, become a Core Participant in the Public Inquiry into Undercover Policing, etc.
- Help them document what happened* to them in their own voice.

Further tips and resources: [www.policespiesoutoflives.org.uk/are-you-affected](http://www.policespiesoutoflives.org.uk/are-you-affected)

## Paranoia

Finally, we have mentioned paranoia a couple of times—it is important to watch-out for this. At the *Undercover Research Group* we have observed common symptoms such as seeing ‘spooks’ at every turn or pointing a finger at everyone who has ever done anything vaguely out of place, without any sense of analysis and refusing to conduct a proper investigation.

The last example, of a group not prepared to engage in a well thought-out investigation, is the one that more often than not distinguishes between those with genuine suspicions and those who have let paranoia enter their life.

Paranoia is not helpful to any group—it simply disrupts any real sense of security or process. On the other hand, paranoia may point to underlying issues that need to be dealt with, such as a reaction to a sense of loss of control or burn-out. This can be a difficult to deal with, and ultimately it comes down to the person themselves as to how much help they will let you give them.

As a general piece of advice, it is best to not be short or rough with a person you believe is experiencing paranoia—this won’t ‘snap them out of it’. Similarly, it’s unhelpful to simply state you believe them.

Gently question the person as to what they believe or fear, but do not let them draw you into ‘their’ world of paranoia. Listen honestly but cautiously and make it clear that what is being said is something that you are not in a position to fully commit to. Challenge any discrepancies respectfully and be open to the fact that you may not be dealing with paranoia but serious concerns.

Another aspect of paranoia is when it masquerades as security awareness. Security is about reducing risk to an acceptable level so you can get on and do things; paranoia is when that goes too far and stops things from happening at all, often due to a general fear of the state’s apparently all-encompassing power. As activist groups have demonstrated time and time again, even with several undercover police in your midst, you can achieve a lot.



## FINAL NOTES

Ironically, an investigation with a good process can be inspiring and empowering, despite the fact that uncovering a spycop is (at the very least) unpleasant. The material for this article has been drawn from a number of such processes and includes feedback from those involved. In many cases, the groups were actually strengthened, though the path they travelled was often rocky.

In writing this pamphlet, our aim has not been to encourage paranoia, but to reduce it. Too often allegations based on rumour and speculation are thrown around, and the only people that helps are our enemies. We have attempted to give you some tools and techniques to enable you to carry out substantive investigations to put an end to rumours and bad practice, and to strengthen us all in the process.

Despite all that the police have thrown at us and the deep damage they have caused, they have still not destroyed us. Special Branch used to boast that once they infiltrated a group it was dead. We know this to be untrue. There are far more of us than there ever were of them, and we are still around, still active, in many different ways and in many different movements. Campaigns have been lost over the years, and others have been won—and inspiringly so. Giving in to a fatalism that there is nothing we can do just lets the state and the police win. There is much we can do. There are many issues still to be won, campaigns to be fought. Tactics will change, adapt and accommodate to the reality on the ground as we find work-arounds, but what matters is why we all started out as political activists in the first place.

Ironically, we now learn that spycops have had unexpected side-effects, such as court cases being dropped or campaigns actually being helped. We know of numerous cases where a spycop's presence has led to activists being protected, as the officer couldn't act on intelligence for fear of blowing their cover.

Finally, one common question we are asked is how to bring new people into our groups. How can we combine openness with security? There is no single answer. Each group will have its own needs and priorities. What matters is that you create, from the very start, a culture that fits your group's ambitions, and that you stick to it. Don't be afraid to ask people questions, but do be open about why you are doing so. If you feel you need a higher level of security or secrecy, work out what specific threats you face and plan how to address them in order to minimize risk. There is no such thing as 100% security, but there are always ways of working around things.

Corporations and the state may heavily invest in an attempt to stop us, yet so many actions have taken place over the years, so many different groups are taking sensible precautions and succeeding in their actions—this is clear evidence that we can still outsmart them all when we put our minds to it.

# APPENDIX

## 15 Questions We Work With

This is a list of the 15 Questions. These questions can also be found at:  
[www.UndercoverResearch.net/1260-2/](http://www.UndercoverResearch.net/1260-2/)

### 1. Is their background missing?

Generally, the undercover has very little in the way of background story. They will often have a 'legend'—where they are from, why they left. Details will generally be quite sparse, and there is very little overlap between their previous world and their activist one. It is rare to meet friends (or see their photos) from their 'previous' life, even though they may be discussed or the suspect claims he goes to see them. Undercovers will also have a lack of presence in the public record, though this is not always obvious until one starts investigating them seriously.

**Caveat:** it is known that several undercovers did bring other people through—generally these are considered 'background artistes' used to help bolster an undercover's story. For example, Lynn Watson introduced several boyfriends to activist friends. Generally these other people have only appeared once or twice, and at times have been noted for their unusual or provocative behaviour.

### 2. Are their politics missing, under-developed or stereotyped?

Related to the first question, in most cases undercovers have had very little to say in relation to the politics of the movement they are infiltrating. Although they are indeed interested in listening to others (though some eschewed any interest in the name of cynicism), they contribute little on that score and generally avoid or head-off such discussions. Where they demonstrate interest, it is often superficial and the books and background material they have are standard, popular stuff showing little depth or breadth.

**Caveat:** clearly this can be applied to a lot of campaigners, but in some groups it is a reason for standing out.

### 3. Has anyone ever met their family?

Some undercovers never talk about their family, while others talk about them a lot. However opportunities to meet them never quite come off—there are always excuses. Undercovers can produce photos and other material indicating the existence of supposed family members, and talk about having close relationships with them. Others have spun stories about abusive relationships (and used these stories to build trust), but inconsistently talk about how they are going to see them. Sometimes family crises, such as a seriously ill father, are used as an excuse to go away for extended periods of time.

#### **4. Does their job take them away for periods at a time?**

It appears that many undercovers have jobs that require them to be away for extended periods, up to several weeks at a time. These jobs would also supply them with money, vehicles and excuses to put receipts 'through the books'. Depending on the nature of the job, most are reluctant to bring activists into contact with their employers. E.g. Lynn Watson was a care-worker, but when friends asked about working with her agency, she kept them at bay.

#### **5. Does their home look un-lived in?**

A common theme is how un-homely or not lived-in their houses were, though—again—not in every case. There would be materials around that indicated 'political activist', but they are the exception rather than the norm, looking more staged than anything. There would also be a lack of personal touch and possessions. The most noted case was Lynn Watson's house which had overdone Class War posters and little in the way of personal touch.

#### **6. Do they have a vehicle?**

Most exposed undercovers had vehicles and were very willing to use them for the purposes of campaigning, including doing reconnaissances and actions. The vehicles would vary in type and model, and include vans. Sometimes the undercovers claimed the car came through their work.

#### **7. Do they have above-average driving skills?**

Something commented on a lot of undercovers is their above average driving skills, which is not unsurprising given a Special Branch or other police background.

#### **8. Would you consider them to be someone who goes out of their way to be helpful?**

The charm, friendliness and general kindness of the undercovers is regularly noted upon. They come across as ready to go out of their way to help. In particular, they are happy to give lifts to and from campaigner's homes.

#### **9. Do they have ready access to money and are they generous with it?**

They are often ready to help people out with money, such as waive petrol costs or buy rounds of food or drink. Sometimes they will claim that expenses are already covered in some way—through their work for instance. They are not necessarily flash, but seem to have ready access to cash.

#### **10. Do they focus relationships on key people?**

It is not uncommon for them—after getting involved in a group—to 'make a beeline' for key people and become very close to them personally and in campaigning. This often leads to them being seen as 'second in command', etc.

### **11. Do they ever exhibit noticeable out-of-character behaviour?**

A number of undercovers have been known to do something quite out of character that either disrupted an action and alerted police, or was distinctly far from the norm of the group. Examples are: inexplicable carelessness (Jim Boyling sabotaged a blockade during a Reclaim the Streets action by ‘forgetting’ to keep a window closed, so that the car was easy to remove by the police), or doing things beyond the group’s normal mode of behaviour (encouraging activities that put other members at risk, or taking them into unplanned confrontations).

Related to this is spreading stories about more serious involvement in radical action elsewhere to give the impression they are ‘up for it’, though this would differ from how they normally present and actually behave in given situations.

### **12. Have you spotted oddities?**

A number of distinguishing features we have encountered in our research that are worth noting if you come across them:

- Documents are held in names other than that they are known by (these can sometimes be explained away; not all discrepancies are without good reason).
- Organisational skills at odds with their persona.
- Not having the skills they claim, especially where it is within their alleged job (Mark Jenner, for instance claimed to be a professional joiner but was unable to fit a kitchen). Related to this is not knowing enough about something they claim to be into, particularly a football team.
- A focus on cleanliness and order that puts them at the far end of the activist spectrum, or at odds with it (e.g. Mark Kennedy getting his hair regularly styled at professional hairdressers).
- Characteristics that indicate some formal training (e.g. how they do their boots).
- Reacting to surprise situations in ways that indicate training (e.g. Jenner reacting to a noise outside by dropping in the correct moves to react to a bomb explosion).
- Owning a very expensive bit of equipment that is somewhat out of characteristic for them or their milieu (top of the range phone, watch).
- Doing something that seems to be signalling to someone else.

### **13. Have there been weird things around court cases or lack of police interest?**

Sometimes undercover officers have inexplicably been dropped from a court case, or they choose to have a different solicitor from everyone else. Or you may have experienced a noticeable lack of police interest during the period the undercover was part of your group, or people would not be arrested when it would be otherwise be expected. It is now known that the undercovers’ handlers were

turning a blind eye to illegal activities on occasions, and would go out of their way to keep the undercover from going to court.

**Caveat:** The opposite might be true too: there are several strong examples of undercovers turning up in court using their false names to give evidence for instance—these have led to overturned convictions eventually.

#### **14. Did they suddenly disappear and cut off all contact?**

This question is a section in itself as the ‘exit strategy’ is one of the most important aspects of the tradecraft for those investigating a potential undercover. In every case we are aware of undercovers have served a term of four to five years, then left relatively abruptly. It is quite telling how time and again two strategies are used, sometimes in combination:

- a) they go abroad, or
- b) act out some kind of mental breakdown, including actual tears.

More importantly, they disappear completely, totally cutting themselves off from their activist social life. In several cases, not attending funerals or coming to other events related to people they were once very close to has given rise to suspicions. Sometimes, the situation has been more complicated, because the undercover continued to tangle up their personal life and their professional undercover one, which is called ‘going native’. Mike Chitty, for instance, returned after supposedly having left for Canada to socialise with activist friends, while he continued his job in the protective service—a different section of Special Branch. Kennedy came back after he had left the police, and tried to use his activist contacts to set up shop as a corporate spy selling the information he gathered.

#### **15. Can you help us kill these myths?**

We are aware that some people believe or have believed undercovers had a code of conduct, that there were things they would not do. We flag these rumours up here to help put an end to them.

Some people say undercovers should never:

- commit illegal activities;
- have sexual relationships with people they were targeting;
- deny they are police when asked directly (some would even joke about it).

*We know that all of these things have been done regularly by undercover officers.*

## **Important caveats to the 15 Questions**

*If you find someone whose story ticks a number of these boxes, it does not necessarily mean you are dealing with an undercover officer.* It merely means that your suspicions warrant further digging and investigations. These questions are a starting point, not a way to prove a case.

We strongly discourage people from spreading rumours based on suspicions alone, and we recommend following up suspicions with serious research as quickly as possible. Gossiping without confirmation does much harm and can destroy groups from within, regardless of whether or not there is any actual infiltration.

It is important to remember that while there might be commonalities among the way undercovers operate, there are also as many differences, particularly around what they seek to achieve: some directly facilitate a group, while others seek to destroy it, for instance.

We also note that there are many good reasons for people to fall into the same categories without being an undercover, our framework is not fail-safe. For example, there are pretty valid reasons for not having contact with your family, or for people to disappear. Suffering from burn-out is also a common a reason for activists to withdraw (if you or someone you know is affected by burn-out contact *Counselling for Social Change* for support—see below).

Furthermore, not all undercover stories are exactly the same, there will be variations: so not fitting the pattern does not necessarily put someone in the clear either. Apart from that, other forms of infiltration (by security services or corporations, or through informers) will show very different patterns. If you have any questions or concerns or want to run unusual situations by us, do get in contact.

**N.B. If you post these questions anywhere, please make sure to leave the caveats in place.**

# RESOURCES

## Organisations

*Undercover Research Group*—[UndercoverResearch.net](http://UndercoverResearch.net) with full profiles on undercover officers at [Powerbase.info](http://Powerbase.info)

*Spycop.Info* (also a facebook group)

*Police Spies Out Of Lives*—[PoliceSpiesOutOfLives.org.uk](http://PoliceSpiesOutOfLives.org.uk)

*ARSpyCatcher* (blog)—[network23.org/arspycatcher/](http://network23.org/arspycatcher/)

*Campaign Opposing Police Surveillance*—[CampaignOpposingPoliceSurveillance.com](http://CampaignOpposingPoliceSurveillance.com)

*Public Inquiry into Undercover Policing*—[UCPI.org.uk](http://UCPI.org.uk)

*The Monitoring Group* has also put on several conferences on the issue of undercover policing. You can find videos of talks from them at [www.tmg-uk.org/watch-the-videos-from-our-conference-subversion-sabotage-and-spying-political-policing-and-racism-in-the-uk/](http://www.tmg-uk.org/watch-the-videos-from-our-conference-subversion-sabotage-and-spying-political-policing-and-racism-in-the-uk/)

On **twitter**, follow the hashtag #spycops

## Counselling resources

*Counselling for Social Change*—[CounsellingForSocialChange.org.uk](http://CounsellingForSocialChange.org.uk)

*British Association for Counselling & Psychotherapy*—[BACP.co.uk](http://BACP.co.uk)

## Books

Rob Evans & Paul Lewis, *Undercover: The True Story of Britain's Secret Police*

Eveline Lubbers, *Secret Manoeuvres in the Dark: Corporate Spying on Activists*

Dave Smith & Phil Chamberlain, *Blacklisted: The Secret War between Big Business and Union Activists*

This pamphlet was created with input from many people, including some directly affected and those supporting them, as well as others with knowledge in this field.

Our thanks to all who contributed.

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