

Monday 10th March, 2025

AN OPEN LETTER TO THE UNDERCOVER POLICING INQUIRY

We, the undersigned witnesses and core participants in the Undercover Policing Inquiry, were victims and survivors of abuses by the Metropolitan Police's political undercover unit, the 'Special Demonstration Squad' (SDS), between 1993 and 2008, and the 'National Public Order Intelligence Unit' (NPOIU) and its successors between 1999 and 2014 (i.e. the period covered by Tranches 3 and 4, or T3 and T4, of the Inquiry).

We write this open letter to express our collective position, outline the grave concerns we have about the Inquiry's process, and demand immediate changes to ensure a fair, transparent, and effective investigation.

We have collectively decided not to submit our evidence until the Inquiry engages substantively and meaningfully with Non-State Core Participants' concerns to ensure fairness for all:

1. All core participants need full disclosure and reasonable timetables.
2. Witnesses must not be excluded as a result of insufficient time to prepare – we seek assurances our evidence will be heard.

Background

The Undercover Policing Inquiry is one of the most secretive 'public' inquiries ever conducted. For over eight years, it operated largely behind closed doors, working with the State to establish redaction protocols for classified documents and ensure protection and anonymity for many perpetrators. These processes are not explained and we are not given proper opportunity to challenge them.

Despite our willingness to engage since the Inquiry's announcement in 2014, seeking truth about Britain's undercover and secret political policing, disclosure to civilian witnesses and public hearings didn't begin until 2020.

To date, the Inquiry has only completed the first two tranches (T1 and T2), examining evidence about one police unit, the SDS, for the period 1968 to 1992. Nevertheless, evidence heard in these earlier tranches revealed extensive wrongdoing and has led to numerous serious apologies from the Metropolitan Police: to the women targeted for abusive sexual relationships; for the targeting of anti-racist organisations and family justice campaigns; for the use of deceased children's identities; and for chronic failures of supervision and management. The Metropolitan Police admitted in early 2023 that the evidence from T1 had shown that SDS tactics were 'unjustifiable'.

The Chair's interim report for the Inquiry published in June 2023 concluded that the SDS should have been 'brought to a rapid end' in the early 1970s. Since then, the evidence of the SDS operations during the T2 period has shown that the tactics deployed only got worse and increased in scale.

Home Secretary, Yvette Cooper, following lobbying by Core Participants, explicitly and publicly stated last September that it was vital that the Inquiry was conducted fairly. As we prepare for the longest set of hearings so far the Inquiry should be doing its utmost to ensure we can provide the best evidence possible.

More than two decades of undercover operations remain to be investigated. As we come to deal with more recent events, it becomes harder for the police to dismiss such abuses as ‘historic’, and the Inquiry’s investigations will have increasing relevance for current policing practice.

However, many documents are missing from these later tranches, some may be lost but others are known to have been intentionally destroyed by the police. Our evidence is therefore crucial for a comprehensive investigation. We need time to seek our own sources and corroborate or contrast the information in the police files – the T1 and T2 hearings clearly demonstrated that police evidence can often be highly unreliable.

Witness evidence for the next round of hearings

Core Participants only began receiving T3 files at the end of 2024. We are given just 48 hours notice by the Inquiry of when the files will arrive and many have yet to receive any. We have waited over a decade to receive disclosure about the spying operations against us and our groups.

Our lawyers have been denied funding to work on statements in advance, so it was with some shock that we received the news that our witness statements have to be completed in just six weeks.

We told the Inquiry it was an impossible task, and deeply unfair when you consider that the police have had years to prepare. For witnesses who have already received requests for statements, we consider most will need until at least the end of April to complete them. Core participants yet to receive disclosure are likely to need 12 weeks.

On 7 February, the Inquiry publicly announced it was postponing the next round of hearings from April to October 2025, proclaiming on its website that this was “to allow adequate time for witnesses, core participants, recognised legal representatives and the Inquiry team to prepare their evidence”.

However, just seven days later, on 12 February, they informed us by letter that “the deadline for the return of witness evidence will remain unchanged at 6 weeks. Again, any applications for an extension of time must be submitted before the deadline with detailed reasons. Extensions of time will be granted only in exceptional circumstances.”

It seems the seven-month extension was intended solely for the convenience of the Inquiry legal team. This position was reiterated on Friday 7 March with the added threat that if we miss a deadline, our evidence “may not be considered by the Inquiry and the Chairman may decide to de-designate and/ or withdraw funding.”

We need more time

Our legal representatives have repeatedly explained why we need more time: we all have employment, family commitments, personal health issues, or other responsibilities. We must work on this evidence in our free time, without compensation from the Inquiry.

Now having denied our requests to expand the six-week deadline, the Inquiry are asking us to individually account for our health conditions and personal circumstances to beg for extensions. It is deeply intrusive, and is adding to our workload and distress. Individual applications also add an extra layer of work for the Inquiry staff and solicitors (and our own overstretched legal teams).

Producing witness statements for this inquiry is a difficult and often painful process. Reading these documents forces us to relive traumatic experiences and confront painful truths: we are discovering

new information about the extent of the deceit, betrayal, and abuses perpetrated against us by the State; we must face the sexist, racist, cruel, and prejudiced attitudes of people we once believed were our comrades; some of us have to confront unexpected and unfounded allegations made against us to justify these spying operations, which were never raised at the time but remained in secret police documents for decades; and we are all finding that vital material is missing or being withheld from us in a disclosure process that is not fit for purpose.

Much information about spying on the groups and campaigns we were involved in is not being included in our witness packs, and the Inquiry is mostly limiting civilian disclosure to files that specifically mentioned us by name.

After waiting for many years to contribute to this Inquiry, our evidence is being sabotaged by inadequate disclosure and insufficient time. If this continues, the Inquiry's investigation of much of the spying will be based only on the partial and partisan evidence provided by the police, while we are denied any real right to challenge their evidence or reply to allegations at the witness evidence stage.

Despite claiming to take a 'trauma-informed approach', the Inquiry has rejected numerous collective submissions asking for more time. Meanwhile, our questions and correspondence often go unanswered.

Experiences from Tranche 2 saw some individual core participants singled out, with legal funding limited or withdrawn and witnesses being denied access to hearing bundles because statements were not submitted on time. This approach feels intimidating, punitive and disrespectful. It goes against the spirit of participation and disregards the efforts we have put in.

We refuse to allow this unfairness to happen again and are taking a collective stand to protect the most vulnerable among us. We will not submit our evidence until the Inquiry engages substantively and meaningfully with these concerns.

We urge the Inquiry to work with us to ensure a fair, thorough, and transparent process. We ask for the meeting with the Inquiry chair (which has been agreed) to be scheduled as soon as possible so we can discuss these issues and find a way forward that serves the interests of justice and truth.

Signed,

1. Alex Hodson 2. Alex Owolade 3. Alice Cutler Clarke 4. Alice Jelinek 5. 'Alison' 6. Alistair Alexander 7. Andrew Robertson 8. 'ARB' 9. Ben Leamy 10. Ben Stewart 11. Brendan Delaney 12. Brendan Mee 13. Brian Healy 14. Carolyn Wilson	31.Emily Apple 32.Frances Wright 33.Frank Bennett 34.Frank Smith 35.Gerrah Selby 36.'GRD' 37.Grainne Gannon 38.Dr Harry Halpin 39.Helen Steel 40.Honor Robson 41.Indra Donafresco 42.Jane Laporte 43.Jason Kirkpatrick 44.Jason Mahoney	61.Martin Shaw 62.Matt Salusbury 63.Merrick Cork 64.Morgana Donafresco 65.Myk Zeitlin 66.'Monica' 67.'Naomi' 68.Nicola Harris (Tapping) 69.Norman Blair 70.Olaf Bayer 71.Patrick Gillett 72.Paul Chatterton 73.Paul Gravett 74.Robert Banbury
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15. 'Callum' 16. Ceri Gibbons 17. Chris Brian 18. Claire Hildreth 19. Claire Fauset 20. Dan Gilman 21. Danny Chivers 22. Dave Morris 23. Dave Smith 24. Debbie Vincent 25. Denise Fuller 26. Donal O'Driscoll 27. Donna McLean 28. Duwayne Brooks 29. Eleanor Fairbaird ('Jane') 30. 'Ellie'	(Mullen) 45. Jay Jordan 46. Jesse Schust 47. 'Jessica' 48. John Jones 49. Juliet McBride 50. Karen Doyle 51. Kate Holcombe 52. Kate Wilson 53. Kirk Jackson 54. Leila Deen 55. 'Lindsey' 56. Lindsey German 57. 'Lisa' 58. Lisa Teuscher 59. Lois Austin 60. Malcolm Carroll	75. Robin Lane 76. Roger Geffen 77. 'Sara' 78. Shane Collins 79. Sian Jones 80. Simon Lewis 81. Simon Taylor 82. Spencer Cooke 83. Steve Acheson 84. Steve Hedley 85. Sukhdev Reel 86. Suresh Grover 87. Tina Miller 88. Tish Reel 89. Tom Fowler 90. Tom Harris 91. 'Wendy' 92. Zoe Young
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