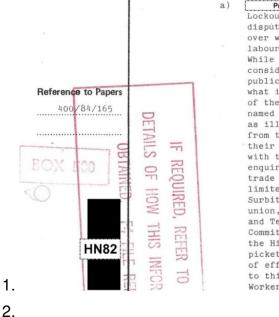
BLACKLIST BLOG

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Spycops scandal: All police files must be released, victimised site workers say



one of the five-man 'Laing's Privacy Lockout Committee', reported on the continuing dispute with the John Laing construction company over working conditions and the use of 'lump' labour at the Company's Surbiton building site While the Lockout Committee's cause has been considerably aided by the interest shown, and publicity from, left-wing groups in relation to what is seen as the High Court's unique application of the 1980 Employment Act (a decision against named individuals rather than union organisations as illustrated by the attached 'Surbiton Six' from the Revolutionary Communist Party (RCP), their efforts very recently suffered a setback with the outcome of a National Conciliation Panel enquiry into the dispute. The Panel, comprising trade union and employer's representatives limited the scope of the dispute to the original Surbiton site and instructed the Lockout Committee's union, the Union of Construction, Allied Trades and Technicians (UCATT), not to support the Committee's broader activities, thereby compounding the High Court injunctions which ordered their picket to be restricted to Surbiton. In terms of effective picketing, the most damaging side to this result was that Transport and General Workers Union (TGWU) members, representing drivers

Campaigners are calling for the release of all police files relating to the spycops scandal, after recently disclosed Special Branch documents prove that undercover police reported on union members speaking at meetings to request solidarity.

One such file (400/84/165, excerpt reproduced above), until recently subject to a Restriction Order, was compiled by an undercover police spy who used the cover name Nicholas Green when attending a meeting of left-wing activists held in March 1986. The meeting was held at the Cock Tavern in Euston, which has been the venue for trade union and left wing campaigns for decades. The majority of the Special Branch file is a report of a speech given by Brian Higgins, a Scottish bricklayer and activist in UCATT (the building workers' union).

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Higgins was one of six construction workers who were sacked by the blacklisting building contractor, John Laing, in a dispute about direct employment. The victimised workers were collectively known as the Laing's Lock Out Committee. Taking place at the same time as the miners' strike, the industrial action gained a high profile at the time and saw a High Court Injunction being granted against all the pickets.

The police file records how Higgins spoke about developments in the dispute and made a request for solidarity from those present. Both the financial appeal leaflet and an 8 page rank & file paper called 'Building Worker' are included the police report. The first page of the file is stamped 'BOX 500', which indicates that the report was sent to MI5. The last page of the report shows the Special Branch file numbers for Brian Higgins himself, and for the construction union UCATT.

In an internal police report known as Operation Reuben, the police admit that intelligence gathered by undercover policing was shared by both Special Branch and the security services, with employers and the notorious blacklisting organisations; the Economic League and the Consulting Association.

Brian Higgins was one of many union activists spied on by undercover police and blacklisted by major construction employers. He passed away in 2019, so never got to see any of the documentary evidence of police spying. On viewing the police file reporting on their father, Monica and Noelle Higgins issued a joint statement:

"Our dad campaigned for better health and safety and workers' rights all of his life. He always said Special Branch were involved in his blacklisting, and this is now proven beyond any doubt. It's just a bit of a strange feeling to see it in print. Treated as enemies of the state, as if you were planning civil unrest or domestic terror attacks! It's unbelievable, but shows how scared the state are of militant workers, and how far they are prepared to go. The police saw this as politics, but the impact on our family was very personal."

The Blacklist Support Group (BSG), the campaign representing blacklisted union members, is a core participant in the public inquiry. The Special Branch file was disclosed to BSG but with Restriction Orders put in place meaning that until now the files were not allowed to be shared in the public domain. Dave Smith, BSG secretary (himself a core participant in the inquiry and an ex-UCATT Branch Secretary and) commented:

"The undercover cop known as Nicholas Green reported on UCATT member Brian Higgins: but it could have happened to absolutely any union activist asking for solidarity

while on strike. Speaking at meetings during an industrial dispute is a perfectly legal union activity: it is not subversion. Despite police denials, the UK political police units *were* gathering intelligence on trade unionists prepared to stand up for workers' rights. There is now conclusive evidence that Special Branch infiltrated trade union meetings and kept files on every trade union in the UK. To get to the truth of this anti-democratic state spying on trade unions, all the spycops files need to be disclosed to those who were spied on".



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Operation Reuben Unpicked – by Undercover Research Group: https://specialbranchfiles.uk/operation-reuben-unpicked-pt1/

Special Branch file 400/84/165 on the Undercover Policing Inquiry website: https://www.ucpi.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2024/07/UCPI0000026544.pdf

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book: http://newint.org/books/politics/blacklisted-secret-war/

video: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=eNcgrNs6pB8

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