



liberty central Surveillance

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Letters

Surveillance of protesters

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The question of the accountability of the [Association of Chief Police Officers](#) raised by Mark Thomas ([Doth I protest too much](#), 26 October) has concerned me for some time. Through my local MP I recently received the following information from the Home Office.

On public accountability, Acpo is "directly accountable to its members, not the public". On the question of accountability to the Home Office: "In 2008/9, the total amount paid to Acpo was £16,804,075." Home Office oversight is restricted to "ensuring that project-related funding to any organisation is used appropriately". So Acpo's only answerability in the project to collect data on "domestic extremists" is to satisfy accountants at the Home Office.

Finally, "as a private limited company, Acpo is not subject to the Freedom of Information Act". However, very recently Acpo has agreed voluntarily to entertain FoI enquiries - perhaps in the hope of avoiding a future obligation.

So here we have a private body that is responsible for national policing strategies and projects, yet is answerable neither to the public, nor to government. To top it all, I understand it is not included in the current government review of police accountability.

The policing functions of Acpo should be reallocated to a body with proper public accountability, and Acpo confined to the role of representing the

professional interests of its members.

Jasper Woodcock

London

- Mark Thomas is right to make jokes about the honour bestowed upon him as Photo H, but lots of us know the sharp side of this surveillance, as well as the funny bits. On the latter, when Mrs Thatcher was gracing Leeds with a visit in the early 1980s, the discovery of an explosive device in the Tory party office brought two officers to our door. "Is Max in, love?" the plod asked my partner. "We just need a quick word - nowt to worry about." "So why do the files you are carrying saying 'Bomb Incident'?" "Oh, you're a bright lass aren't you?" says our custodian of democracy.

But only a few years before, the same police force fabricated evidence against me simply because I was an identified and noisy critic of the racist policing of black youth in Leeds. We have every reason to fear state power, and its increasingly sophisticated means of classifying us, as many British Muslims will attest.

Professor Max Farrar

Leeds

- Your report ([Police in £9m scheme to log 'domestic extremists'](#), 26 October) highlights that many demonstrators are being monitored by the police. What is the legal basis for doing so if demonstrating is legal? And what is the basis for terming people "domestic extremists", when according to polls they represent majority public opinion? Many will conclude that the real reason for this surveillance is to deter people from demonstrating.

Lindsey German and Andrew Murray

[Stop the War Coalition](#)

- Last Tuesday my granddaughter was charged with violent disorder for her part in a protest against the arms trade fair in 2008. The evidence was CCTV footage of her moving a police barrier. The judge seemed surprised at the charge of violent disorder and, as there was no police evidence suggesting that they had been intimidated, the case was dismissed. So what is going on? There seem to be two possible answers, both alarming. One, that the police and the CPS are in a hopeless muddle, bringing a case under a charge which could not possibly succeed. The other, that there is a systematic attempt to intimidate protesters by hanging serious charges over their heads for as long as possible.

Michael Power

Falmouth, Cornwall

- There is a branch of L Ron Hubbard's Scientology business in Tottenham Court Road which occasionally attracts weekend demonstrations. These

affairs are invariably easily policed, however many participants wear replicas of the mask worn by the character V in the graphic novel [V for Vendetta](#). This practice, if more widely adopted, could render police spotter guides less helpful.

Phil Coughlin

London

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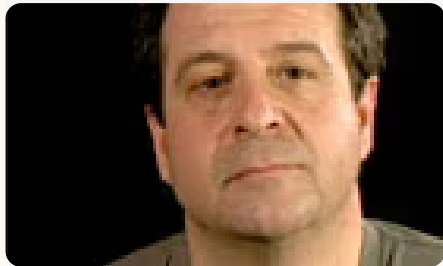


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