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Corporate hired spies are here to stay

Peter Bleksley

With the police facing cuts and protests on the rise, employing private sector covert services is a rational business decision

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 Protesters meet during a demonstration at Ratcliffe-on-Soar power station, owned by E.ON, which has hired security firms. Photograph: Christopher Furlong/Getty

A small independent garage is repeatedly targeted by thieves intent on stealing expensive tools. A flagship academy suffers the same fate, only it's the IT equipment that the burglars want. A **global energy supplier wants to protect its power plant**. Step forward the private security sector.

Police forces are stretched to breaking point and face deep cuts. They are constantly forced to review what they do and how they do it. As discontent and protest grows, I believe the police will be forced to focus more on their core task of keeping the peace. That means they'll be less likely to deal with teenagers sending threatening texts, online fraud, other forms of financial deception and more.

This will open the door to even more protective and investigative services coming from the private sector. Such companies already touch on our lives whenever we attend a sporting or music event, or go shopping. Behind almost every high-visibility guard we see there is a company offering a wide range of covert services.

In the past decade I have worked for many of these companies. Some of them are an absolute disgrace. One was set up by a failed cop who got himself a website and a mobile phone and, suddenly, he can call himself a security company. An uninsured, unethical and dangerous security company, that is. I've seen thuggish former doormen do the same thing, and I've listened to their staff boast about the wanton acts of violence they've carried out. I've also worked for global outfits that build their entire management structure on a bedrock of bullying, while hoodwinking executive clients into thinking they're brand leaders.

Fortunately there are others within the industry who act lawfully and with integrity, and whose creativity and audacity enables them to achieve what their clients need. Their operations are widespread and their successes sometimes prevent more price rises being foisted upon us, as fraudsters, cheats, thieves and con artists are stopped, frustrated, and often bought to book. It is entirely likely that the cost of your car, holiday and home insurance would all be higher were it not for the secretive work carried out by the corporate world's hired spies.

Meanwhile, the president of the Association of Chief Police Officers, Sir Hugh Orde, whinges about the private sector deploying "completely uncontrolled and unrestrained players". This comes from a man who presides over no less than four units set up to deal with "domestic extremism", and "public order intelligence", one of whom inserted **Mark Kennedy** and his cohorts into the climate campaign movement. Given what's been disclosed about his activities, it would be fair to ask how controlled and restrained PC Kennedy was. May I also remind you that these units under Orde's control receive public funding, yet are not designated as "public bodies", so don't waste your time compiling a **Freedom of Information Act** application to see their costs, or examine their expenses - the act doesn't apply to them.

In an imperfect world where we have two-tier health and education systems, it should come as no surprise to anybody that we have two-tier security and investigation operations. The truth is, if you can afford it, you can have your own private uniformed force, and your own highly experienced, highly trained and fully resourced private CID. Energy firms, just like many other companies, seek cost-effective solutions to issues that can damage revenue streams, branding and assets. It's a rational business decision for them to use every available legal tool to manage threats to their operations. Deal with it, because we're here to stay.

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