



Cifgreen Environment

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## Police climate spies can't break us

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Planting police spies among green activists was an attempt to derail a growing social movement - and it has failed

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Undercover policeman Mark Kennedy ... 'The very thing these officers abused - our friendship, trust, and community - made us resilient.' Photograph: Guardian

I knew [Officer A](#) well - or rather, I thought I knew her well - and I had met [Mark Kennedy](#) on many occasions. On a personal level I feel real sadness about the loss of someone I considered a friend. On a political level this raises some questions of real concern to everyone.

In a combined 11 years of undercover operations, the evidence gathered by these officers led to not one arrest or conviction. In fact, the operation had the opposite effect, causing the collapse of one trial relating to the activist protest at the [Ratcliffe-on-Soar](#) power station in October 2009. Undercover operations are normally aimed at securing evidence for trial and arrest, but these operations were not so much about the transgression of laws but more an attempt to disrupt and demoralise a nascent and growing social movement.

The other justification for the use of undercover officers is to protect the public. The police often use the politics of fear to justify their behaviour and no doubt protect budgets. Hugh Orde was in full fear mode [on Newsnight](#), pushing the idea that the Ratcliffe action would have shut down the national grid and deprived hospitals of electricity. He must know that the grid can deal with big outages and that even if it failed all hospitals have back up systems. It is Eon that would have suffered, not the public. Climate camp actions, such as the [Drax train blockade](#), were typically aimed at highly profitable corporations, and tried to avoid confrontation with the public. It's fair to say, then, that this is a move beyond political policing. We are now

seeing a publicly funded police force used as a national private security service for large corporations.

The effectiveness of these officers is also questionable. Not only did they fail to secure any convictions, they failed to significantly undermine the movement. A commitment to decentralisation and challenging hierarchy has made the grassroots climate movement resistant to infiltration. A decapitation strategy doesn't really work on a movement that's all heads. In addition, a politics that sought to engage people in mass open actions meant secrets couldn't be exposed because often there were none.

In the end, the very thing that these officers abused - our capacity for friendship, trust, and community - made us resilient. Like a cell dividing for every action that failed, people would regroup and try again. And despite our radical politics, many were willing to join with other more mainstream groups in tactical alliances that helped gain political leverage. Without the efforts of our movement, it is likely that both a third Heathrow runway and a series of new coal-fired power stations would now have had the go-ahead.

This controversy also exposes Westminster elites who profess to care about civil liberties and the environment but are cowed when real events call for action. Where are the calls for a judicial inquiry? Where is the parliamentary inquiry? The deafening silence of supposedly centre-left politicians in both the Labour party and the Lib Dems exposes two parties that want the support of liberals but have nothing to offer them, even after a vast police operation is exposed as having used illegitimate tactics to silence the environmental movement.

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