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Ratcliffe case: Police smear campaign continues despite Mark Kennedy revelations

Bradley Day

The police are wrongly insisting that the planned shutdown of the power station would disrupt power and threaten lives

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What if more than 100 people gained access to one of the UK's largest coal-fired power stations, with the aim of closing it down for a week?" These carefully considered words, spoken in January 2009, kick-started some of the most exciting and terrifying months of my life.

Coal was, and remains, the dirtiest of all fossil fuels. If we had been successful in our plans to close down the Ratcliffe-on-Soar coal-fired power station for a week, it's estimated we would have prevented 150,000 tonnes of carbon dioxide from entering the atmosphere.

There were two conditions of us taking the action. Firstly, that it would not result in any power failure. Secondly, that we could do it in a way that was 100% safe with no risk of danger to anyone.

The first condition was easy enough. Anyone who has a grain of knowledge about the National Grid knows that it is fully equipped to deal with power stations going offline unannounced at any time. Indeed, our grid is so resilient that the last time we suffered any serious power failing was in 1987 (the year I was born). Even then, it only concerned a small region in the south east. We knew categorically that our action would not result in a single lightbulb going off.

For the second condition, we spent months conducting extensive research, purchasing the appropriate equipment, and ensuring we had people with the relevant expert skills taking part in the action.

We now know the police were fully aware of both the above points from the very beginning of our planning. One of their own officers, posing as an activist and instructed by his bosses, aided us every step of the way.

One seemingly small part of our plan was to take video recording equipment to the power station with us. This was not merely for enhancing our publicity.

As a climate movement we had become increasingly used to the police deploying smear stories as a tactic. The fictitious tales would often emerge as vain attempts to justify excessive policing that the public would otherwise consider unacceptable.

A good example is the 2008 Climate Camp at Kingsnorth. Home Office minister Vernon Coaker was forced to apologise months later for claiming that 70 police officers were injured during the event, after it emerged that the majority of those injuries came from incidental occurrences such as bee stings and sunstroke. One can only assume this particular smear story was to excuse their illegal use of stop and searches at the camp, which led to activists receiving thousands of pounds of compensation.

Knowing we would be hidden away from public view up a chimney at Ratcliffe-on-Soar, we had cameras at the ready to counter any tall tale the police would attempt to give about our behaviour. With the shocking scenes of the G20 just a week before, and the death of Ian Tomlinson, we were also geared up to document the police's behaviour.

Our fear of smear stories proved not to be speculative paranoia. Despite the police preventing the action from taking place and arresting 114 people, it didn't take long before the police press machine began claiming that we were a "serious threat" to society for months to come.

Twenty of those arrested, including myself, recently went on trial as a result of our planned intentions to close down the power station. We failed to convince a jury that we were taking action out of necessity to combat climate change. However, we certainly convinced the judge that our two provisos for taking the action were sincere. In his comments at sentencing, he said:

"It is right to emphasise that this the planned action would have had no practical effect on the electricity supply ... It was your intention that this invasion would have been peaceable and safe. Violence was to be avoided, and the safety of the workers at the power station was paramount. You were fully equipped to carry out your roles safely."

These words from a high court judge did not stop the police in going straight back to the media, stating our actions would have endangered human life and "caused significant disruption to the public".

Even following the revelations about PC Mark Kennedy's role in the action, they still play the same game. Hugh Orde, head of Association of Chief Police Officers, suggested on Newsnight last week that the action would have prevented electricity from reaching hospitals and vulnerable people for a considerable period of time. I find it deeply disturbing that a senior police officer with a responsibility for the country's national security doesn't seem to comprehend how his own National Grid works.

This saga of undercover officers has produced some very serious questions that require answers. The revelations that came out over the weekend about covert police recordings being hidden from the courtroom means that a very serious miscarriage of justice is suspected to have taken place. Do our police want to be proactive in ensuring justice is done and learn from their mistakes, or will they simply cover their eyes and ears while continuing their childish smear campaign?

The police, in their defence, have offered us two flimsy olive branches. Firstly, an investigation by the Independent Police Complaints Commission. Yet, the remit of this investigation is ridiculously narrow. It seeks only to examine the relationship between Nottinghamshire police and the Crown Prosecution Service, meaning shadowy bodies such as the National Public Order Intelligence Unit (who employed PC Mark Kennedy) will retain their dangerous invisibility. They have also announced an HM Inspectorate of

Constabulary investigation, a police-staffed body whose last investigation into the policing of protesters resulted in zero change on the ground.

Whether the police are monotonously smearing activists, or fobbing us off with ineffective investigations, we can see through their strategy. A growing number of voices are demanding that there is a genuinely independent, public and wide-ranging inquiry heard before a judge. If the police want to rescue their fast depleting credibility, they need to show their willingness to co-operate with such a process rather than be seen to desperately employ whatever means necessary to avoid it.

- Bradley Day has been campaigning on climate change for the past half-decade. Much of this time has been devoted to organising for the Camp for Climate Action

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