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# Covert operation criticised by official watchdog

The official police inspectorate criticised the covert infiltration of political groups this week, but it was probably a disaster waiting to happen for some years

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**Rob Evans**

Fri 3 Feb 2012 13:58 GMT

So at last a key report into the undercover policing controversy was published this week. Dennis O'Connor, the head of the body inspecting the police, finally produced his delayed report yesterday after [cancelling its publication at the](#) last minute in the autumn.

Here was our take on [O'Connor's report](#) - we wrote that the [clandestine operation that secretly deployed police spies in political groups](#) for 40 years was severely criticised by the inspectorate which recommended a tightening up of the controls on such undercover operations.

We also reported on [how Mark Kennedy, the spy at the centre of the controversy](#), was beaten up by his own police colleagues and how he was criticised by O'Connor.

The report has been written by an establishment figure, but given that, it is striking how he criticises the covert operation to infiltrate political campaigns. O'Connor concluded, for instance, that the undercover deployments were weakly controlled and led to "disproportionate intrusion" into the lives of the activists.

History tells us that any state operation which is hidden behind years of secrecy will almost inevitably lead to abuses. The controversy which has erupted over the past 12 months was probably a disaster waiting to happen for some years. As it happened, it was Kennedy who brought it to a head, but we understand that he was not the first of these undercover police officers to go out of control or awol.

O'Connor says that in future, these undercover deployments should be approved beforehand by an outside organisation, the Office of the [Surveillance](#) Commissioners.

Potentially this could mean that there will be fewer deployments in protest groups as police chiefs will have to justify them to some-one outside their cosy circle. Only time will tell.

O'Connor's report had little to say on one of the most explosive aspects of the controversy - undercover officers sleeping with, **and even having children**, with the activists **they have been sent to spy on**.

This was criticised by the eight women who have started legal action against police chiefs. They say that they **were duped into forming** long-term loving relationships with undercover policemen and suffered intense emotional trauma and pain.

In a statement, the eight said : "This report misses an opportunity to clearly and unequivocally outlaw any undercover operative from entering into and maintaining a long term intimate relationships whilst undercover".

"It is of concern that whilst the report recognises the psychological harm that may be caused to the police officer,

no mention is made of the harm they cause to the women with whom they enter such a relationship which is potentially far more serious. There can be no justification for such relationships and for the outrageous state intrusion on the privacy of those concerned nor for the serious emotional and psychological damage caused".

O'Connor criticised Kennedy on a series of counts, particularly for defying his instructions from his supervisors. Kennedy rejected the criticism, **telling the BBC that** he was "outraged" at the claim that he had not obeyed orders.

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