



Guardian diary Police

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Diary: Undercover cops: there'll be a price to pay

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Lawyers predict an expensive bill for the Met

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- As undercover police revelations tumble daily from a fetid closet, lawyers take time out from travails about legal-aid cuts to consider what the disclosures might mean in terms of liability for the Met. And the picture isn't pretty. During a lecture at the [Institute of Advanced Legal Studies](#) on the post-Leveson environment, uber-barrister Geoffrey Robertson pointed out that Scotland Yard could be sued for maintenance of the children so disreputably sired by its undercover officers. The liabilities there seem extensive: upbringing, schooling, etc; future and retrospective of course. And then, he said, there is the matter of the [McLibel leaflet](#). The document - sharply critical of McDonald's - became the basis of the longest-running case in English legal history. It cost an extremely pretty penny. McDonald's, having won its pyrrhic victory, said it would not collect the £40,000 awarded by the courts. But what might it think in retrospect, given that it now appears that one of the authors of the pamphlet was Bob Lambert, the undercover police officer who posed for years as an environmental activist. Opens up a whole range of new possibilities. Fellow lawyers nodded enthusiastically. We may hear more of this.

- An outrage, of course, that some undercover officers so egregiously crossed the line. But there might be something to be said for the others. Sure they're snoops. But they have vans and flats and cash. [London](#) Assembly member Jenny Jones tells Twitter followers that her people have learned to be pragmatic. "In the Green party we've always assumed there are spies," she says. "But we've no secrets so (we) see them as state aid."

- More news of our friend Roger Scruton. When last we heard, he was busy plotting the recapture of Britain's institutions from the left and identifying the Guardian as a key target. We have kept the windows locked ever since. We got in touch because he has become caught up in the fate of the randy former prime minister of Italy and jailbird-in-waiting, [Silvio Berlusconi](#). During a farcical rally in Rome, [Giuliano Ferrara](#) - rotund, ribald editor of the rightwing journal Il Foglio - lauded Scruton as one who had come to "bunga bunga" Berlusconi's defence. A lead article said more. Scruton compared the former PM to Marie Antoinette "accused of every possible crime ... so that she could be presented as a being that did not belong to the normal human race". Is that right, prof, we asked him? Not quite, he said. He did talk to an Italian journalist, but much of the material quoted is drawn from a book he wrote on pessimism that never mentioned Berlusconi at all. Scruton says he has never compared Berlusconi to Marie Antoinette. Has never met him. Isn't a supporter. Still, he does regard "the attacks on Berlusconi as largely motivated by politics, rather than seriously held moral conviction". So we doubt he'll sue.

- Big news from St Paul's Cathedral, its precincts famously cleared of the Occupy protesters who were making the place such an eyesore. The aesthetic restored, it is once more a place of wonder and beauty. At least it was until yesterday when the area cleared of tents was given over to a rather

unlovely portable building: a home for staff during admin office refurbishment.

- Join us, finally, for a why-oh-why condemnation of the people whose very mission in life is to enforce 'elf and safety. Daily they impose their will, rendering innocent pastimes sinister, forcing diktats that defy common sense. Mojo magazine reveals the impact on sixties singer Arthur Brown. His 1968 hit Fire has always been much enhanced by the fact that he sings it live wearing a helmet shooting flames from the top of his head. "Before every gig," reports Mojo, "the singer still has to decide whether the layout of the venue (low ceilings, etc) will allow him to use the fire helmet. Down the years he has repeatedly set fire to himself - as well as the person lighting the helmet. In a concession to health and safety, he now uses a butane canister instead of petrol." Poor Arthur. The flames are there, but it's not the same.

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