

## **How Special Branch Spied on the Animal Rights Movement**

Since 2010 there have been revelations about police infiltration of protest groups. For over 40 years the state sanctioned the use of undercover police to gain intelligence on political activists, including animal rights campaigners.

Though it was widely assumed that groups were under surveillance, no-one would have imagined the extent to which the secret state burrowed deep into organisations, established close friendships and sexual relationships with activists, and broke the law to further its objectives. This article will explain how it happened and what can be learnt from it.

### **The Special Demonstrations Squad**

The story begins in 1968, when tens of thousands of people marched against the Vietnam War. In March there was rioting as protesters fought with police outside the American Embassy in London and the government was so alarmed that it set up of the Special Demonstrations Squad (SDS).

Although the police had used undercover officers before to catch criminals, this was as Rob Evans and Paul Lewis say in their book 'Undercover', 'a new concept in policing.' Special Branch officers transformed themselves into activists and lived amongst their targets for several years. They changed their appearance and used fake identities to penetrate political groups to the highest levels to gain intelligence and to enable the police to maintain public order. The nickname for the SDS was 'the hairies' because - in the early days at least - their operatives had to grow their hair long in order in order to blend into the milieu of radical politics.

The job of the SDS was to infiltrate groups considered subversive which meant those that 'threatened the safety or well-being of the state or undermined parliamentary democracy'. Initially this meant mainly Marxist or Trotskyist groups, as well as the anti-apartheid movement in the seventies.

### **The eighties: Robert Lambert**

By the early eighties, however, the animal rights movement had become established. It was attracting thousands of people on

protest marches against vivisection and groups like the Animal Liberation Front (ALF) were rescuing animals and damaging property. To the state this was a dangerous and subversive threat.

Evans and Lewis say Special Branch first became involved when one of its operatives was deployed at the World Day for Lab Animals march in April 1983. Shortly afterwards a second spy was sent in. His name was Robert Lambert and he became an almost legendary figure amongst his colleagues. For the activists who knew him he was equally unforgettable, though nowadays it is for all the wrong reasons.

Lambert called himself Bob Robinson. Like all SDS agents he stole the identity of a dead child. Mark Robert Robinson died aged seven in 1959, only to be quietly resurrected 24 years later by Lambert who would have found his birth and death certificates. He was then given a forged driving licence, passport and other documents. This procedure was known in SDS circles as the 'Jackal Run' because it was based on the book, 'The Day of the Jackal'.

Lambert quickly immersed himself in the world of animal rights by going to protests and meetings. At a demo outside Hackney Town Hall he met Jackie, 12 years younger than him, and they soon started a relationship and their son was born in 1985. Lambert was already married with two children but knew an activist girlfriend would give his cover an added dimension, making him appear a fully rounded, genuine person.

### **London Greenpeace and the ALF**

In 1984 Lambert became involved in London Greenpeace (LG). This wasn't an AR group as such but a radical organisation (not to be confused with the much larger Greenpeace International) that embraced anarchism and direct action. Up to then it had been mainly concerned with anti-nuclear and environmental issues but in the mid-eighties it adopted much more of an animal liberation stance.

The first LG meeting I attended was a public meeting with a speaker from the ALF in 1985. Lambert chaired the discussion and obviously had a prominent role in the group. He soon became a close friend. Like all the spies that followed him, Lambert had a van that was used to take people to demos. He said he was a gardener and needed a vehicle for his job.

Lambert's mission was to infiltrate the ALF and he made it clear he was a strong supporter of illegal actions. In 1986 he organised a benefit gig for the ALF Supporters Group but kept back some of the takings to buy glass etching fluid, used to damage windows. Soon afterwards he confided to friends that he had dressed as a jogger and thrown paint stripper over a car belonging to the director of an animal laboratory.

He also wrote two notable publications. One was a simple A5 leaflet titled 'You are the ALF!' which exhorted people to do direct action themselves, not ask others to do so on their behalf. The other was a booklet called 'London ALF News' which had articles on the ALF and a diary of actions, including attacks he had carried out.

### **Debenhams**

In July 1987 the ALF targeted three Debenhams' department stores with incendiary devices because they sold fur. In two, water from the sprinklers caused hundreds of thousands of pounds in losses, but at the Luton branch they had been switched off and fire gutted the store, causing over £6m in damage.

Two months later, Andrew Clarke and Geoff Sheppard were caught at the latter's bedsit in Tottenham in the act of making incendiary devices as the police burst in. In June 1988 at the Old Bailey Sheppard received 4 years and 4 months and Clarke 3 ½ years. Obviously the police had been tipped off but neither activist knew who it was until nearly 24 years later when Lambert was uncovered as a spy.

Lambert, according to Sheppard, was the third member of this cell. Neither activist suspected him but then they had good reason not to - as far as they were concerned he had planted the device in the Harrow store that caused £340,000 in damage. The last time I saw Lambert was in a pub near the LG office in Kings Cross in November 1988. He was unusually downbeat as he told me his father who had dementia had just died and the values he fought for in World War II were dying too under Thatcherism. He also said Jackie had started a relationship with a fascist and he was no longer allowed to see his son. Both stories were lies and I now know he was preparing for his exit.

All undercover spies have an exit strategy, usually prepared months if not years in advance. Lamberts would have been devised

around the time of the Debenhams action but departing too soon would have appeared suspicious. He waited for over a year, until he left allegedly on the run from Special Branch, which was in fact his employer. They even staged a fake raid at the flat where he was staying.

### **John Dines**

By the beginning of 1989 Bob Robinson was just a memory but LG already had another spy in its ranks. John Dines, using the surname Barker, had joined the group in October 1987. During the next year as he rose to prominence, Lambert was on the wane - going to fewer meetings and demos. This was a pattern that would be repeated time and time again.

Like his mentor, Lambert, Dines had van which he used for demos. He twice drove activists all the way to Yorkshire to sab grouse shoots and he also took them to a protest against Sun Valley Chickens in Herefordshire. While there he was apparently arrested but released without charge. He too produced an anonymous publication called 'Business as Usual', which comprised a diary of actions, and he also organised two benefit gigs for London Greenpeace in late 1989.

### **John Dines and McLibel**

While LG was well known in activist circles - mainly for the anti-McDonald's campaign it had started several years earlier - it hardly registered to the outside world. Most people confused it with Greenpeace International. All that began to change, however, when five of its supporters were sued for libel by McDonald's in September 1990.

None of the defendants had written the pamphlet that was the subject of the writ; in fact three of them weren't even part of the group at that time. Ironically Lambert had been one of the architects of the 'What's Wrong with McDonald's' factsheet but he was long gone.

McDonald's placed several infiltrators of its own in the group from the autumn of 1989 onwards with the result that it became infested with spies. At some meetings there were more of them than genuine activists. These new corporate spies aroused suspicion - they didn't quite fit in - and some of them were followed. One of those doing the following was Dines, together

with Helen Steel, who would later be sued and become Dines' girlfriend..

In January 1991 I and two others decided to cut our losses and apologise. Helen and Dave Morris carried on fighting the case as the McLibel 2. By their side was Dines who was the group's treasurer and a key player. He relayed the legal advice they received and the tactical discussions they had with other group members back to his bosses in the SDS who then passed it on to McDonald's. Several years later the McLibel trial revealed that Special Branch and McDonald's had exchanged information about London Greenpeace. Morris and Steel sued the Metropolitan Police over this and received £10,000 in an out of court settlement and an apology.

### **London Boots Action Group: Andy Davey and Matt Rayner**

By the early nineties the animal rights movement was on a roll again and three activists decided to set up a new London-wide organisation called London Boots Action Group (LBAG), to target Boots plc, which at that time did animal testing. LBAG was unashamedly pro-direct action so it is no surprise that it became a target for the SDS. The group was launched in November 1991 with a public meeting that attracted nearly 100 people, two of whom were spies.

Andy Davey and Matt Rayner were two of the many new people to join the fledgling group. But they were slightly different - they had vans, which made them both unusual and useful, and they got quickly involved. Both also had jobs (quite rare in those days as many activists were either unemployed or students). Davey was a 'man with a van' removal service - his nickname was 'Andy Van' - while Rayner said he worked for a company that delivered musical instruments.

Each lived in a bedsit, Davey in Streatham, south London, Rayner in north London. They even looked similar - tall, dark haired and with glasses, and spoke with Home Counties accents. What set Davey apart from other agents was his dog, named Lucy who came from an animal rescue person that lived locally. His bosses probably decided he would appear a more authentic activist if he had a companion animal.

Personality-wise they differed though. While Rayner was easy going and friendly, enjoying social situations, Davey had a somewhat hesitant and nervous manner and could at times appear

too eager to please. Initially there were suspicions about both but they quickly assimilated into the protest scene. They would have known who each other were, as their unit had only about a dozen operatives at any time, but they weren't close. This meant that if one spy was uncovered, the other wouldn't fall under suspicion.

It was not common practice for two spies to be placed in the same group. In the book Undercover, the whistleblower Peter Francis says the SDS had two animal rights spies when he joined it in January 1993. This was indicative of the threat posed by animal rights in general and LBAG in particular.

Davey was so well entrenched that he began to produce the group's newsletter. Shortly afterwards he also transferred the mailing list onto a computer. We were in the era when some organisations still did not have their own PC or internet access and his IT expertise was considered invaluable. Spies are trained to exploit skills shortages like this, to ensure they become trusted and above suspicion.

Rayner, too, was a fixture in the London scene. He would usually be the one to drive activists to demos outside London. A notable example was the 1993 Grand National when he took a vanload of people to Aintree. This was the year the race had to be abandoned because the course was invaded, costing the betting industry over £60m.

In 1995 - following former spy Dines' example - he drove a carload of saboteurs to the 'Glorious Twelfth' to sab a grouse shoot. While there he was arrested and taken into police custody, only to be released a few hours later. He wasn't charged but this brush with the law only served to improve his standing.

### **London Animal Action: Davey's exit**

Rayner had a long term relationship with a female activist. Davey never managed this though it wasn't for want of trying and he gained a reputation as a lecher. This no doubt undermined his status - some saw him as a bit sad, others didn't really take to him - and it probably played a part in the decision to take him out of the group. This happened quickly as he announced he was 'stressed' and was going to Eastern Europe. The double life he was leading was probably taking its toll as well. He left in February 1995 with a farewell social to which only a few people

came. Shortly afterwards a hunt sab whom he knew received a couple of letters postmarked abroad.

As Davey's exit was hasty, the spy who replaced him joined London Animal Action - as LBAG was now called - around the same time he left. Unusually the new agent was female and her name was Christine Green. As she set about inveigling herself into the group, Rayner's deployment was reaching its climax. In May 1995 Geoff Sheppard's flat was raided again by the police where they found materials for making an incendiary device and a sawn-off shotgun. In October he was sentenced to seven years in prison.

After Geoff's release we speculated on why the police had chosen him. Devices were being placed in various targets and it appeared to have been simply a chance raid due to his arrest in the eighties. However, it is now clear that Rayner set Geoff up just as Lambert had done years earlier. No-one suspected him of the sting because he was, like his boss had been, an established and trusted of the group: by 1995 he was LAA treasurer.

### **Lambert the spymaster**

By the mid-nineties Lambert was the operational manager of the SDS thanks to his 'legendary tour of duty' a decade earlier. According to Evans and Lewis he was 'the gaffer...pulling the strings like a puppet-master' and he used his experience to guide a new generation of infiltrators who were in some cases spying on the same activists as he had. Geoff was one of those and he describes Rayner as being 'up to his neck' in direct action. The final proof came in April 2013 when it was discovered the real Matthew Rayner died aged four in 1972. We still don't know his true identity.

One of Lambert's first duties when he re-joined the SDS was to write a report on a spy who had 'gone rogue' named Mike Chitty. Chitty - known as Mike Blake - had penetrated the animal rights movement in London at the same time as Lambert but in comparison his deployment had been a failure. It resulted in no high-profile ALF arrests and it seems he enjoyed socialising more than targeting subversives. Even worse, when his deployment finished he returned to his activist comrades, leading a double life unbeknownst to his employers or his wife. He was eventually pensioned off after he began legal action against the Met for the stress he suffered due to his covert role.

## **Rayner's exit strategy**

Clearly not everybody could cope with the demands of undercover work. Davey may have been one of those but Rayner made of different stuff. His exit strategy was masterly in execution, bearing the hallmark of his mentor and manager, Lambert, who had written a report highlighting the importance of 'carefully crafted withdrawal plans' to convince 'increasingly security-conscious target groups of the authenticity of a manufactured departure...inevitably this entails travel to a foreign country.'

In November 1996 Rayner apparently went to work in France for a wine company. He had always liked France and could speak the language fluently. To a few close friends he mentioned his unease with activism after being raided by the police and the breakdown of the relationship with his girlfriend. Very well liked, he was given a big going away party, presented with a camera from the group and a speech wishing him well in his new life.

The next day he drove to France in his van and with him were two activist friends. At the port they were questioned by a police officer who said he was from Special Branch before letting them go on their way. This plan was concocted for the activists' benefit in the knowledge they would tell others about it, lending further credibility to Rayner's exit. A few weeks later he briefly came back to London and met up with friends before supposedly returning to France for good. Then over a period of about a year letters were sent and phone messages were left saying he had moved to Argentina, and after that he was never heard from again.

## **Christine Green**

By 1997 Green was occupying a key part of the group, driving activists to demos, going to meetings and mailouts and taking part in protests, as her predecessors had done. She had even taken over Rayner's role of group treasurer. The same pattern repeating itself but no-one was aware of it. For the next two years Green appears to have been the only spy in LAA. Perhaps there was another who remains unexposed - though this seems unlikely - or the SDS may have deployed another spy elsewhere.

To enhance her cover, Green began a relationship with a well-known hunt saboteur whose job was a coach driver and they took



coach loads of protesters to some of the high profile demos of the time, for example at Hillgrove Farm. There is no suggestion that the sab was a spy. There was speculation surrounding her, however: she was not always easy to get along with - though she did make some friends -and she always carried the same bag around with her, which inevitably drew suspicion.

Towards the end of 1999 Green let it be known she was tired with activism. Early in 2000 she said she was departing to Australia for a relative's funeral and would stay there travelling. About a year later, though, she reappeared and made contact with a few activist friends. Several years later in 2010 she cropped up once more, this time in Cornwall where she was spotted with the same boyfriend in a veggie café. Someone who knew them from LAA tried to have a chat and was all but ignored.

### **Dave Evans**

Green's replacement in and the last known SDS spy was Dave Evans. Like Dines he appeared to be from New Zealand and he had the same rugged appearance. He had a van and was a gardener too, so very much in the Lambert mould, except his personality couldn't have been more different. While his boss was amiable, even charming, Evans could be a bit peevish and erratic: once he turned up at a demo then left after only a few minutes saying his flatmate was locked out. Typically spies spent five or six days in the field, only returning to their families for one night per week, but on one occasion he went missing for so long that people became concerned and went round to his flat.

A lot of the time he gave the impression of not being very committed and more interested in the social side of the group. LAA had a big drinking culture which he took to like a duck to water and he often took part in fundraising at festivals by working in bars. In SDS parlance he was a 'shallow paddler', not a 'deep swimmer'.

In the last year or so of his deployment, Evans' involvement in animal rights tapered off somewhat and it was recently revealed that his flatmate was Jason Bishop, a spy active in anti-capitalist groups. The pair drove minibuses to the G8 protests in Scotland in 2005. Both were arrested with other activists for conspiracy to commit a breach of the peace but the charges were dropped.

## **Evans' exit and the end of the SDS**

Evans was last seen at the AR Gathering in 2005. While sitting around a bonfire he began asking other activists questions about LAA, which had just folded after its bank account containing thousands of pounds was seized by Huntingdon Life Sciences. The mask slipped and it became obvious that he was a cop. He must have realised this because he left the next morning and was never seen again. Evans was the last known SDS spy in London animal rights circles. There were also at least two corporate infiltrators during this period, one of whom worked her way up to be group treasurer before she was uncovered.

In 2008 the SDS was disbanded, its functions supplanted by the National Public Order Intelligence Unit (NPOIU) set up a few years earlier. This was one of three pillars of a new secret state established by the Labour government to combat 'domestic extremism', a term which encompassed anyone who wanted to 'prevent something happening or to change legislation or domestic policy outside of the normal democratic process.' The others were the National Extremism Tactical Co-ordination Unit (NETCU) and the National Domestic Extremism Team.

There is no reason to believe that intelligence gathering has diminished in the last few years. The animal rights movement has been perceived as less of a threat, mainly due to the imprisonment of certain activists, but the emergence of the anti-badger cull campaign will undoubtedly lead to an increase in surveillance and spying. The 'Undercover' book also mentions a recent spy in the Welsh animal rights scene but does not go into detail.

## **Conclusion: (1) How were we duped?**

With the benefit of hindsight it appears obvious that animal rights groups in London were targeted by undercover police who followed the same pattern over a period of at least two decades. In that case why did no-one find out what was going on?

The answer lies in Lambert, the spymaster, who established the template the rest followed. For 23 years 'Bob' as he was known was held in such high esteem and affection that his authenticity wasn't doubted. He was one of us, an anarchist and animal liberationist, who had fled overseas to build a new life. Nobody guessed he was working just a few miles away at Scotland Yard.

The agents that followed - Dines, Davey, Rayner, Green and Evans - did attract suspicion but only individually, not as a sequence. The people they spied upon were activists fighting for animal rights and a better world, welcoming of outsiders into their groups, not spycatchers. Moreover the suspicions were usually no more than of the 'they are a bit dodgy' variety, with little or no concrete evidence. Many people have been falsely accused in this way over the years.

The whole thing finally fell apart thanks to the determination of two women: Helen Steel and Laura, the girlfriend of a spy called Jim Boyling, whom she met in Reclaim the Streets in 1999. She managed to track him down after he left her and he confessed about Lambert and Dines. Helen had spent years searching for the latter after he supposedly ran off abroad in 1992. By 2010 she knew he had been a cop but it was Laura who confirmed that he was also a spy. At the same time Mark Kennedy, who worked for the NPOIU, was unmasked.

### **Conclusion: (2) What difference does it make?**

The next important question is what difference does it make? Isn't this just history? While a lot of this happened a long time ago it does stretch up almost to the present. Those who experienced this also have to show what the state is capable of doing to other, newer activists. Should we should trust politicians and believe the promises made by political parties or is the state fundamentally a force for repression? Can we cooperate with a system that tries to disrupt and undermine groups and individuals in this way?

What went on still matters because when we sweep away all the intrigue and scandal, we are left with a very simple fact: the spies were there to prevent animals being saved. This article has concentrated on what occurred in London because that's where the writer has mainly been active but there is no question that infiltration went on elsewhere. We know, for instance, that there was a spy active inside SHAC before the mass arrests of 2007.

Many people have been arrested, convicted and even imprisoned during the struggle for animal rights and if it can be proved that a spy was involved, then those convictions are possibly unsafe. Even if their role was only driving activists to a demo where they were arrested, then there could be good grounds for an appeal. This is especially true if those nicked discussed

their case with the spy, because this information would have been passed on to the police.

So far a total of 56 convictions or attempted prosecutions of environmental protesters have been overturned, abandoned or called into question over the past two years following disclosures surrounding the activities of undercover police officers. Most of these relate to Mark Kennedy and two climate change actions against power stations in 2008 and 2009.

Most defendants are being represented by Mike Schwarz from Bindmans and he has said he is keen to act for animal rights campaigners who want to try to overturn their convictions. But in order to do that we first have to find out who the spies were.

Conclusion: (3) Learning the lessons

There are no fewer than 15 investigations taking police into the role of undercover police. The main one is Operation Herne which is an internal Metropolitan Police enquiry This will last up to three years and cost millions of pounds but many of the victims of the SDS, including women who had relationships with spies, are boycotting it. They have instead called for an independent public enquiry as when the police investigate themselves the result is inevitably a whitewash.

What can activists themselves learn? Well firstly we should not succumb to paranoia. This may sound strange after what we know now but it is important to realise that the spies were in a small minority. Yes there were several in LBAG/LAA over the years but the group was large and regularly attracted over 50 people to its meetings.

There are, however, commonsense precautions that can be taken. The modus operandi of Special Branch agents - such as using dead children's' identities and driving vans - will not be replicated by current spies but if there are certain aspects of a person's behaviour that don't make sense or appear suspicious, then it is entirely reasonable to find out the truth. If that means questioning the person to ascertain whether they are a bone fide activist, then so be it. A genuine person would not object to this line of enquiry if the reason for it were explained to them.

Finally the lesson to take from all this is that we are making a difference. The state would not have invested such huge resources in trying to undermine the animal rights movement if it did not fear what we stand for. This is something we should be proud of.

If you have any further information or would like to join an email distribution list called ARspycatcher please contact: ARspycatcher@riseup.net

Further reading:

"Undercover: the true story of Britain's secret police" by Rob Evans & Paul Lewis, Guardian Books, 2013.

"Secret manoeuvres in the dark: corporate and police spying on activists" by Eveline Lubbers, Pluto Press, 2013.

<http://www.theguardian.com/uk/undercover-with-paul-lewis-and-rob-evans>  
Journalists' blog

<http://policespiesoutoflives.org.uk/>  
Women deceived into having relationships with spies who are suing the police.

<http://secretmanoeuvresinthedark.wordpress.com/>  
Website based on book of the same name

<http://netpol.org/about/>  
The Network for Police Monitoring

<https://www.facebook.com/groups/153226204887721/>  
Facebook group for ARspycatcher

