

ECONOMIC (IN)JUSTICE

FACTSHEET - TACTIC

Name	Police Spies Out Of Lives (PSOOL)
Details, area of experience	Political activists who found out their activist lovers were undercover Metropolitan Police officers.
Interview date	December 2020
Issues addressed	Undercover police infiltration of political campaigns
Injustice category (linked to economic injustice)	ability <input type="checkbox"/> age <input type="checkbox"/> class <input type="checkbox"/> faith <input type="checkbox"/> gender <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> neuro-diversity <input type="checkbox"/> race <input type="checkbox"/> sexuality <input type="checkbox"/>
Dates mentioned	1968 till the present
Locations referenced	London, Hackney
Campaigns, movements, protests	PSOOL, Colin Roach Centre, Campaign Opposing Police Surveillance, Undercover Research Group, Monitoring Group, Anti-Apartheid Movement, Peace Movement, Suffragettes
Historical context	Left wing political campaigns from the anti-Vietnam War movement onwards – including anti-racist and environmental groups – were infiltrated by undercover police who had relationships with women who believed they were genuine.
Tactics	Providing support and solidarity for affected women; researching, creating and pursuing legal cases; building relationships with the media, trades unions and politicians; alliances with other campaigning groups; speaking in public forums; presenting evidence to the Home Affairs Select

	Committee; engagement with arts; changing campaign focus over time.
Key words	Undercover Institutional sexism Consent Strategic litigation Alliances
Key points	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The massive betrayal of trust experienced by women who loved, shared lives with and in some cases had children by, men – only to discover they were not who they pretended to be, did not hold the values they had pretended to hold, and were not even using their real names • The police portrayed activists as infringing democracy but PSOOL argue that their actions were a dangerous subversion of democracy and a waste of public money • Many of the undercover police became trusted and influential in the campaigns they infiltrated, so they had a significant impact in preventing change • They see a key aim being to reach the ‘normals’ and there are barriers: people think they know the story, think it was just an individual issue, that women brought it on themselves. The victim blaming is similar to cases of rape • It is important to show the relevance to everyone who is involved in any way with action for change, and particularly for women • There is a cycle of highs and lows in campaigning: times of real progress and strong media coverage can be followed by periods where nothing seems to be being achieved. This, along with what they went through, can have a severe impact on mental health. Solidarity between the women who have this shared experience has therefore been crucial
Stand-out quotations	<p>“You can’t have a campaign without having a campaign: you can’t raise public awareness without talking to the public.”</p> <p>“[In] dealing with the media ... there are benefits, but there are dangers as well.”</p> <p>“We’ve built trusted allies with people who, 20 years ago, we’d have been sneering at in a meeting across the room.”</p> <p>“The ‘normals’, who just don’t necessarily see the world in quite same political terms as we do, they’re the people I want to reach.”</p> <p>“If there is institutional sexism in the Metropolitan Police, that has an impact on every single woman in this country who might come into contact with the police.”</p>

	<p>“It’s not ‘over there’ – it could impact on your life or your family’s life ... on anyone who wants to express their dissent.”</p> <p>“Working through the arts is really important because it does allow people to engage on a different level.”</p> <p>“Raising public awareness not an end goal but a strategy so that decision makers and lawmakers are under public pressure to make change.”</p> <p>“Small change, small steps that over time hopefully will come together to be something seismic.”</p> <p>“Would we be where we are now if all those police spies since 1968 to the present day had not sabotaged and hijacked progressive political movements? Would we be in this mess?”</p> <p>“The solidarity between us is the reason most of are still here, to be honest.”</p>
<p>Story summary</p>	<p>PSOOL was established in 2012 by eight women who had been political activists to bring a legal case against the Metropolitan Police for deploying undercover police officers into their personal lives, including deceptive intimate relationships with them. It began as a support group and expanded to campaigning for justice and change to prevent such deception.</p> <hr/> <p>‘Alison’ was one of the founders. She had been involved with the Colin Roach Centre in Hackney and involved in anti-racist and anti-fascist campaigning. She became sure her lover was an undercover police officer but when she came across Indymedia coverage of Mark Kennedy, who infiltrated environmentalist groups, it became clear to her that there were other women. Undercover work began after anti-Vietnam war demonstrations in the late 1960s. The police decided to investigate anybody active on the political left who were pushing for change. The intention was intelligence gathering for ‘public order’, to pass information on to those policing demonstrations.</p> <p>It is still not known how many women this has happened to, with people they have loved and had relationships with in the most personal, private moments of their lives turning out to be false. More than 22 cases have emerged so far and involved not only the political police, but all branches of policing. A wide range of movements were spied on. Some of the spies ended up in key organiser positions of influence within movements.</p> <p>A key objective of PSOOL has been to raise public awareness. The challenge earlier on was how to move public understanding from seeing these as human interest stories to important political and</p>

	<p>systemic issues. When women were initially not believed, the campaign focus had to change. They needed to control the story. Working with lawyer Harriet Wistrich, they built relationships with key journalists. This was helped by some women waiving anonymity and using their real name, while others such as Alison stay anonymous because of the risks. They have also worked to build trusted alliances across political divides with the trade union movement, parliamentarians in both Houses and high profile celebrities. There is strong engagement with the arts: comedians, writers etc. They work closely with other groups monitoring police surveillance.</p> <p>The ultimate aim is real systemic change and they are using strategic litigation, legal cases to achieve this. The original eight women won an apology and compensation but were forced to settle and could not have their day in court. There is still more to do, such as changes in the laws around consent.</p> <p>There are barriers in the courts: the system feels controlled by the police because judges' sympathies tend to be with national security and secrecy.</p>
Main themes for learners	<p>Grasping how painful and destructive this was for the women affected and for the movements that were infiltrated, many of which promoted values now seen as mainstream (anti-racism, environmentalism etc.)</p> <p>Exploring what is meant by institutional sexism and how that manifests itself</p> <p>The importance of building alliances with people you may not agree with</p> <p>The crucial part played by legal action in bringing about structural change</p> <p>Achieving change can be difficult and take a long time, with times of real setback</p>

<https://www.economicinjustice.org.uk>