

Her Majesty's Big Brother: Britain's Protesters Rebranded "Domestic Extremists"

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In "Mind Your Tweets: CIA and European Union Building Social Networking Surveillance System," Antifascist Calling [explored](#) the trend by security agencies in Europe and the United States to build political dossiers on dissidents by data mining their electronic communications.

Taking a page from America's political police force, the FBI, the British state is beefing-up an ever-growing watch list of "domestic extremists."

As we know, that trend has taken on a Kafkaesque life of its own here in the heimat. Secrecy News [reports](#) that during a Q&A last year with the Senate Judiciary Committee, FBI Director Robert S. Mueller [told](#) the panel that each day between March 2008 and March 2009, "there were an average of more than 1,600 nominations for inclusion on the [Terrorist] watch list."

With this in mind, The Guardian [published](#) a series of extraordinary reports that revealed the mass monitoring of legal political activities by British citizens by the secret state.

Investigative journalists Paul Lewis, Rob Evans and Matthew Taylor provided chilling details how police and corporate spies "are gathering the personal details of thousands of activists who attend political meetings and protests, and storing their data on a network of nationwide intelligence databases."

Are these activists part of a shadowy network of al-Qaeda "sleeper cells" or environmental saboteurs intent on bringing Britain to its knees by targeting critical infrastructure?

Hardly! According to The Guardian, a "hidden apparatus has been constructed to monitor 'domestic extremists'," one that stores this information "on a number of overlapping IT systems, even if they have not committed a crime."

Three national police units responsible for combating domestic extremism are run by the 'terrorism and allied matters' committee of the Association of Chief Police Officers (Acpo). In total, it receives £9m in public funding, from police forces and the Home Office, and employs a staff of 100. (Paul Lewis, Rob Evans and Matthew Taylor, "Police in £9m scheme to log 'domestic extremists'," The Guardian, October 25, 2009)

That's a lot of boodle to spy on antiwar activists, environmentalists, arms' trade opponents and the state's usual suspects—anarchists, socialists and labor militants.

As the journalists point out, the phrase "domestic extremism" is not a lawful term. In fact,

the widespread use of the term is a demonstration of how powerful constituencies have perverted law, thus creating their own all-embracing interpretation of the role of protest in a democratic society.

Indeed, senior officers “describe domestic extremists as individuals or groups ‘that carry out criminal acts of direct action in furtherance of a campaign. These people and activities usually seek to prevent something from happening or to change legislation or domestic policy, but attempt to do so outside of the normal democratic process’.”

Needless to say, that covers a lot of ground and under these fast and loose standards, it is clear that police intelligence agencies and their political masters are seeking to criminalize long-established forms of citizen action such as demonstrations, sit-ins, public meetings and strikes.

Among the newspaper’s revelations we discover that the National Public Order Intelligence Unit (NPOIU), housed at a secret London office, is a giant database of “protest groups and protesters in the country.”

NPOIU’s brief is “to gather, assess, analyse and disseminate intelligence and information relating to criminal activities in the United Kingdom where there is a threat of crime or to public order which arises from domestic extremism or protest activity”.

Chock-a-block with information gathered by Special Branch officers, corporate spies and paid infiltrators attached to the Confidential Intelligence Unit, ACPO’s national coordinator Anton Setchell told the publication that intelligence collected in England and Wales is shunted to NPOIU which “can read across” all the forces’ intelligence and regurgitate what are called “coherent” assessments.

Additionally, Lewis, Evans and Taylor reported:

- Vehicles associated with protesters are being tracked via a nationwide system of automatic number plate recognition (ANPR) cameras.
- Police surveillance units known as Forward Intelligence Teams (FIT) and Evidence Gatherers, record footage and take photographs of campaigners as they enter and leave openly advertised public meetings. These images are entered on force-wide databases so that police can chronicle the campaigners’ political activities. The information is added to the central NPOIU.
- Surveillance officers are provided with “spotter cards” used to identify the faces of target individuals who police believe are at risk of becoming involved in domestic extremism. Targets include high-profile activists regularly seen taking part in protests. One spotter card, produced by the Met to monitor campaigners against an arms fair, includes a mugshot of the comedian Mark Thomas.
- NPOIU works in tandem with two other little-known Acpo branches, the National Extremism Tactical Coordination Unit (Netcu), which advises thousands of companies on how to manage political campaigns, and the National Domestic Extremism Team, which pools intelligence gathered by investigations into protesters across the country. (The Guardian, op. cit.)

Why would British police target law-abiding citizens exercising their right to protest the

depredations of the capitalist order?

Because they *can*! With a logic that only a policeman's mother could love, Setchell told The Guardian: "Just because you have no criminal record does not mean that you are not of interest to the police. Everyone who has got a criminal record did not have one once."

And there you have it: *Precrime* washes up on Blighty's fabled shores!

Merchants of Death and the Secret State: Best Friends Forever!

As if to underscore the point that the business of government in the UK, in the United States, indeed *everywhere*, is business, the National Extremism Tactical Co-ordination Unit (NETCU) "helps police forces, companies, universities and other bodies that are on the receiving end of protest campaigns."

Created by the Home Office in 2004, NETCU's Superintendent Steve Pearl told The Guardian New Labour was "getting really pressurised by big business-pharmaceuticals in particular, and the banks-that they were not able to go about their lawful business because of the extreme criminal behaviour of some people within the animal rights movement."

But as with all things relating to "security," once our minders get a taste of what can be gleaned by deploying new technologies, mission creep inevitably follows. Seamlessly traversing the narrow terrain between "animal rights' extremism" and environmental campaigners, Pearl told the newspaper that the Green movement has now been brought "more on their radar."

But greens and antiwar activists aren't the only ones making an appearance in the "domestic extremist" database. What with enterprising capitalist grifters, pardon, defense corporations, making a killing on a planet-wide scale, it should come as no surprise that the scandal-tainted arms manufacturer, BAE, would be keen to get a handle on who might object to their grisly trade.

Indeed, one of the "domestic extremists" listed on the police spotter card as "target X" was in fact "an alleged infiltrator from the arms company BAE."

According to [The Guardian](#) Martin Hogbin "was national co-ordinator for the Campaign against the Arms Trade. He was later accused of supplying information to a company linked to BAE's security department, but denied the allegation."

With billions of pounds at stake, Europe's largest arms manufacturer continues to be caught-up in a decades' long bribery scandal that spans continents.

And New Labour under Bush's poodle, former Prime Minister Tony Blair and current PM Gordon Brown, have done everything in their power to suppress BAE's prosecution by Britain's Serious Fraud Office. As the World Socialist Web Site [reported](#) earlier this month:

Labour has operated a revolving door between powerful companies, financial consultants and Whitehall, under the guise of bringing entrepreneurial expertise into the civil service, giving the major companies enormous lobbying power. Following pressure from BAE, Rolls Royce and Airbus, the government put a stop to the Export Credit Guarantee Department's attempts to introduce stronger anti-bribery measures. It took a judicial review to get them reinstated.

The late Robin Cook, a former foreign secretary, famously wrote in his memoirs, "I came to learn that the chairman of BAE appeared to have the key to the garden door to No 10. Certainly I never knew No 10 to come up with any decision that would be incommensurate to BAE." (Jean Shaoul, "Britain: BAE Systems faces prosecution for bribery," World Socialist Web Site, October 5, 2009)

That "revolving door" between the secret state, arms manufacturers and the police campaign against protest is spinning ever faster.

When campaigners from the [Smash EDO](#) activist group sought to shut down an arms factory near their home, they were in for a shock.

EDO, an American arms' firm gobbled-up by defense and communications giant ITT Corp. in 2007, reportedly for \$1.8 billion according to [Washington Technology](#), pledged to "unite EDO's business with its own sensing and surveillance capabilities."

ITT Corp. ranked No. 11 on the publication's 2009 "Top 100" [list](#) of prime federal contractors with some \$2.5 billion in total revenue.

ITT is a piece of work itself. According to Anthony Sampson's book *The Sovereign State of ITT*, one of the first American businessmen to pay homage to Adolf Hitler after the Nazis' 1933 seizure of power was none other than Sosthenes Behn, ITT's powerful CEO.

During the 1970s, the firm funded the far-right newspaper *El Mercurio*, the CIA's propaganda arm that was instrumental in the overthrow of Chile's democratically-elected socialist president, Salvador Allende. [Documents](#) published by The National Security Archive, revealed the close collaboration between ITT and the CIA "to rollback the election of socialist leader Salvador Allende."

But that's all in the past, right? Think again!

Smash EDO avers that "EDO's military products include bomb racks, release clips and arming mechanisms for warplanes. They have contracts with the UK Ministry of 'Defence' and US arms giant Raytheon relating to the release mechanisms of the Paveway bomb system." Needless to say, the firm's "products" have been used in facilitating imperialist massacres of civilian populations in Afghanistan and Iraq.

One can see why EDO and parent ITT would be keen on gagging protesters who object to war crimes.

The Guardian [reports](#) that the firm, with the assistance of "Timothy Lawson-Cruttenden (nicknamed TLC by activists) has been accused of gagging protesters' right to demonstrate. The former Household Cavalry officer's favourite legal weapon is the 1997 Protection from Harassment Act. Numerous companies have hired Lawson-Cruttenden and other City lawyers to injunct protesters under the act, a law originally introduced to protect vulnerable women from stalkers."

Under British law, protesters who defy draconian high court injunctions can be jailed for up to *five years* if they break the terms of the court orders.

Lawson-Cruttenden, who claims to have influenced the drafting of the law, obtained an

injunction against Smash EDO in 2005 after the attorney worked with Sussex police to frame a statement that would be beneficial to his client, EDO, which claimed the demonstrators had been “intimidating and harassing” company employees.

But as documents obtained by The Guardian show, Lawson-Cruttenden “developed extensive links with many of the police forces across England and Wales to assist with the policing of injunctions”.

Although a high court judge criticized the attorney for obtaining confidential police material, after being hired by EDO he “continued to acquire secret police papers even though the high court judge in the case had ruled that he was not entitled to them, as they were irrelevant.”

Undeterred however, Lawson-Cruttenden obtained assistance from “the National Extremism Tactical Co-ordination Unit (Netcu) which targets ‘domestic extremists’. The head of Netcu, Superintendent Stephen Pearl, has testified for a number of firms which have obtained injunctions.”

The Guardian revealed that private emails “show that Inspector Nic Clay and Jim Sheldrake of Netcu gave Lawson-Cruttenden the names and contact details of officers at two other police forces as he was ‘keen’ to obtain statements about the activities of the campaigners at a third firm.”

Pearl denied that NETCU had provided assistance to EDO and told the newspaper: “Let me make this quite clear: Netcu, or me, were not involved in the EDO injunction in any way.”

When his mendacious statement was exposed by a close reading of the documents, in an obvious climb-down a NETCU spokesperson claimed there had been a “misunderstanding” and that the unit “had not given evidence for the injunction.” Translation: police had “only” leaked the information to a high-priced corporate attorney who did the dirty work.

The firm lost, the injunction was lifted and the company was forced to pay court costs for the Smash EDO protesters.

Despite this minor victory the secret state, fully in cahoots with giant multinational corporations responsible for the current capitalist economic meltdown, endless imperialist wars of conquest and accelerating environmental destruction will continue to index and target citizens who object to capitalism’s systemic criminality.

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