

Disclosure
Unravelling the Spycops Files
Kate Wilson

London: Weidenfeld and Nicolson, 2025, £20, h/b

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Asa Winstanley (associate editor of *The Electronic Intifada*)¹ made the point that the spycops story is Britain's version of the America's Cointelpro.² It should have been one of the biggest political scandals in our domestic politics since the end of WW2. In a different society, the discovery that British policemen and women, managed and directed by MI5, had infiltrated and spied upon virtually every group on the left from tenants' groups upwards, would have led to major changes in the way the state operates and is monitored.³ In forelock-tugging Blighty, however, it generated a fair bit of copy and a judicial inquiry – the British version of kicking it into the long grass. That inquiry has published the first half of its deliberations,⁴ but the better entry point into all this is the new spycopsresearch site.⁵

With assistance from sympathetic lawyers, this book's author spent a decade pursuing the documents concerning her case. So *chapeau* to Wilson. It is that pursuit which is one of three main threads here. Another is the author's reconstruction of her life *qua* activist, as seen through the reports by 'Mark Stone' (Mark Kennedy) the policeman who became her lover/friend, some of which she got access to. Wilson recounts the bizarre and disconcerting experience of reading her former boyfriend's account of their life together. The third is a portrait of the world of the eco-minded, anti-capitalist activist.

Two things surprised me in this account. The first is the extraordinary scale of the police operation. 'Mark Stone' had a colleague whose job it was simply to keep in touch with him and record messages sent from his

¹ See <<https://electronicintifada.net/>>.

² See, for example, <https://archive.org/details/cointelpro_papers>.

³ There is a good summary of the major items by Asa Winstanley – himself one of those spied upon – at <<https://consortiumnews.com/2021/03/17/britains-secret-political-police/>>.

⁴ <<https://www.ucpi.org.uk/ucpi-interim-report-for-tranche-1/>>

⁵ <<https://www.spycopsresearch.info/>>

Blackberry. And it's not as if the messages contained anything of significance. As the bits and pieces of the reports by 'Stone's' handler released to the author show, it was almost entirely piffle.

The second is the naivety of those, like Wilson, who were spied upon. When 'Stone' arrived, the people Wilson was living and working with – full-time activists – were seriously poor, sometimes eating food found in supermarket dumpsters and travelling by hitch-hiking. Then 'Stone' turns up with a car; and nobody is suspicious? Nobody thought to check 'Stone's' back story?

More than 20 years before Wilson's experience, a group of us in Hull decided to start a local branch of Liberty (National Council for Civil Liberties as it then was). At the initial meeting we went round the table introducing ourselves and a man, whom none of us had seen before, said he was 'here for the gays'. Everything about him was wrong and the meeting blanked him. He never reappeared. Looking back, he was probably not from Special Branch, as we assumed, but from this operation described by Wilson.