

M15 Subversion History and Techniques

Background to subversion

At this time MI5 was still using the same criteria for recording individual subversives and their sympathisers as was set out by Home Secretary David Maxwell-Fyfe in 1952. He called on the services to identify any individual engaged in undermining Parliamentary democracy, national security and/or the economic well-being of the UK by violent, industrial or political means. In fact, many would argue that groups who used only political means to get their point across were merely exercising their democratic rights. In fact, MI5 used photos of demonstrations, copies of election lists and even lists of subscribers to radical left-wing book clubs as indicators of subversive sympathy and membership. Of course, the world was a very different place when I joined the section, almost 40 years after Maxwell-Fyfe's declaration, not least because of the disintegration of the Soviet Union and its Eastern bloc allies.

From Maxwell-Fyfe's statement to Parliament, which was never made law, MI5 and subsequent governments used to argue that all members of certain parties –such as the Communist Party of Great Britain (CPGB) or later the bewildering array of Trotskyists, with names like the International Marxist Group (IMG), Workers' Revolutionary Party (WRP) Major and Minor, Revolutionary Communist Party (RCP) and Revolutionary Communist Group (RCG), anarchists and the extreme right — were threats to the security of the state or our democratic system. This in itself is a contentious proposition. None of these Trotskyist groups was cultivating Eastern bloc finance or building bombs in smoky back rooms, but were instead using legitimate democratic methods to make their case, such as standing in elections, organising demonstrations and 'educating' the workers. They certainly had no allegiance to a foreign power, the primary *raison d'être* for the investigation of subversion, because, unlike the Communist Party, they abhorred the Eastern bloc.

Since MI5 was effectively investigating individuals for holding opinions the government did not like — a very un-British position — it was always at pains to point out that it took its responsibilities with regard to human rights very seriously, although not seriously enough to ensure that these activities were regulated by a legal framework. All the service's phone taps prior to the passing of the Interception of Communications Act (IOCA) in 1985 were unlawful because there was no legislation governing the interception of communications¹. In fact, the Home Office Warrants (HOWs) used to justify phone tapping and covert entry were so vague as to be meaningless. There was certainly not enough information for the minister signing a warrant to make an informed decision about letting the service break into an individual's home or bug their phone.

During publicity interviews for her book, *Open Secret*, the former head of MI5 Dame Stella Rimington demonstrated that she at least was far from sensitive to the illegality of the activities of the service:

"I still thought the essence of the Cold War and spies and stuff was fun,' she said. 'You know, going around listening to people's telephones and opening their mail and stuff."

The Human Rights Act (HRA) provides a number of reasons why a security service is allowed to invade the privacy of an individual. The standard is 'necessary in a democracy'. It does not include 'fun'. Dame Stella also admitted that files were opened on individuals who posed no threat to the state, undermining the

authorities' previous assurances that files were only opened on members of subversive organisations or their sympathisers. This means that MI5 monitoring included legitimate political activists:

"You can say from the position of 2001 that files were opened on people who were not actively threatening the state, but nevertheless, in the context of those days, I think the files that were opened fitted that definition of subversion. I think, in the past, some of our predecessors may have been a bit over enthusiastic (in opening files), but by the time I got there we were very focused on this definition and what we were doing."

She tries to wriggle off the hook by referring to 'that definition of subversion' as if it somehow changed over the years. The truth is, it did not. In August 1997 David disclosed in *The Mail on Sunday* that files were opened on such individuals as Jack Straw and Peter Mandelson. Either they were innocent victims of MI5's over-zealous investigation of subversives, in which case they should demand an explanation from the service and should establish how many others were wrongfully investigated, or they really were a threat to our national security, in which case the British people have a right to know.

In fact, MI5 devoted such significant resources to subversive groups from the 1940s to 1993, when subversion was finally downgraded, that F2 claimed to know more about the finances of the Communist Party of Great Britain (CPGB) than the Party did itself! In communism's heyday from the 1950s to the 1970s, around 60 desk officers – each with a number of support staff – spied on the CPGB alone, although F Branch had dwindled to around nine or ten desk officers and agent runners, plus around 20–30 support and secretarial staff by the time I arrived in 1991.

As public support for communism began to fade during the 1970s and 80s, F2 had become increasingly concerned with Militant Tendency (MT) because of its entryist or 'False Flag' tactics, in which MT members who had infiltrated the Labour party stood as candidates for Parliament and other bodies without declaring their association with Militant. However, by the early 1990s the Soviet bloc had collapsed; the ageing CPGB had become the Democratic Left, and MT was on the point of abandoning entryism. As a result, everyone in F2 believed that there was no justification to continue the investigation of subversion – with the exception of Director F, the man in charge of the Branch. He seemed to have no idea that the work of MI5 should be in defence of democratic values. He was rather more concerned about his standing in the service pecking order alongside other MI5 directors. He saw any reduction in his branch's resources as an attack on his power base in MI5, so he fiercely resisted any attempts to transfer his staff to other branches.

In addition, MI5 management wanted to retain personnel so it would not need to take on extra staff, in the event of it winning the lead in the investigation of the Provisional IRA (PIRA) from the Metropolitan Police Special Branch (MPSB). That was where the Socialist Workers Party (SWP) came in.

My role against the SWP

To my dismay, as I had always been completely apolitical, my first posting after the induction course was to F Branch, the counter-subversion section. During my recruitment, I had been told that MI5 no longer took much interest in subversion, instead focussing increasingly on threats such as terrorism. I had therefore hoped to go straight to a counter-terrorism branch or, failing that, to K Branch (counter-espionage) where I could use my Russian. It was some consolation to find out subsequently that MI5 had a policy of

posting those deemed to be “clear thinkers” to this section, because of the political sensitivity of its work. Perhaps we should infer that the counter-terrorism branches were staffed by muddled thinkers?

In February 1991 I joined F2. The section was tucked away in a little-known MI5 building in Bolton Street, Mayfair. The office was a classic, run-down civil service affair, with battered old wooden desks, lime green wall paint and threadbare carpets. The section when I joined had no computer system; all its records were on paper, a fact which surprised me, as easily accessible information is essential to an intelligence service. This also meant that all my work had to be written out in longhand and passed to my secretary for typing, before coming back to me for corrections. Having worked in other offices with computers, I found this all painfully slow.

My ‘job title’ was F2B/5, and I was in charge of a small team investigating the SWP. David joined F Branch a year later as F2C/7, to study anarchists, communists and extreme right-wingers. David and I met in F2 but we didn’t start going out with each other until spring 1993. Our eyes met across a crowded operations room, he always likes to joke.

All new MI5 officers are ‘mentored’ by a more experienced officer, usually of the same grade, over a period of six months. Some new recruits are lucky. David had Glyn Michaels, my boss at the time, who took his mentoring duties very seriously. I was unlucky. I had Alison Pomdeterre, who appeared completely uninterested in the mentoring process. After only a month of mentoring, I took over the desk and the management of three clerical workers who did the painstaking work of formally identifying “subversives”.

Like any other job, the MI5 desk officer has an IN tray and an OUT tray and processes information. (Officers always also made great use of the PENDING tray for anything that might look difficult.) The difference between MI5 and a normal job is that the information comes in the form of reports from agents in the field or GCHQ ‘sigint’.

As well as routinely processing vast quantities of Linen (product from telephone taps), CHALIS (letters), and source (agent) reports, in my first year in F2 I was tasked to research each area of the SWP’s activities: finance, membership, student numbers, and industrial relations among others, in order to assess whether the party was a threat to national security. It was a moot point whether the SWP had ever posed a realistic threat to the state. But after I’d carried out months of painstaking research, I was in no doubt. Although individual members of the party were committed, the SWP was small, relatively poor, and their politics fell outside MI5’s criteria for investigation – they neither had links to a foreign power, like the Communists, nor did they practice entryism, like Militant Tendency. Their policies advocated educating people so that they could take part in a democratic movement to replace the existing political system. This was hardly the stuff of revolutionary nightmare.

Despite my assessments, senior management in F2 ensured that the SWP assumed an increasingly prominent role in the work of the branch. MI5 management unremittingly applied pressure to me to beef up the case for the study of the SWP, particularly after its (legitimate) support for a number of industrial disputes in the early nineties, which of course posed no threat to national security or Parliamentary democracy. Despite the pressure, I still succeeded in terminating the last remaining telephone tap targeted against an individual subversive in the UK – Tony Cliff, the SWP’s founder – and drastically reducing the number of

agents who for decades had been run against the SWP at great cost to the taxpayer. However, senior managers still insisted that a telephone tap stay in place on the party's HQ.

Even then, F2 policy dictated that any individual who attended six or more meetings of the Socialist Workers' Party was recordable as a 'member: Trotskyist organisation', even where the service knew that many individuals attended these meetings to protest against specific issues such as the NHS cuts or the poll tax, subjects of legitimate dissent.

Failure to transcribe telephone taps

When MI5 took over primacy for the IRA in October 1992, a number of telephone intercept transcribers were transferred to the new T Branch section from F Branch work. English-speaking transcribers were at a premium in T Branch in the service's work against PIRA. As a result, F2 simply did not have the resources to transcribe the vast amount of intelligence gathered from the intercepts on the Socialist Workers' Party and Militant Tendency HQs. Therefore a backlog of untranscribed tapes built up over several months. Although F2 claimed in its HOW applications that these intercepts were absolutely necessary to protect national security and other democratic rights, in 1993 Director F ordered that the untranscribed tapes be destroyed without ever being listened to, even though he had insisted on the phone lines being tapped.

If the SWP and MT really had been in the process of undermining the state, then MI5 would have lost vital intelligence and put the security of the state at risk. This was confirmation, if any were needed, that the intercepts on the SWP and MT were not 'necessary in a democracy' – they could only be destroyed precisely because they were unnecessary — and were therefore unlawful under the European Convention of Human Rights (ECHR).

But the problem was compounded when MT abolished its policy of entryism in late 1992. Since MT's membership had dwindled to less than a thousand and entryism within the Labour movement was MI5's only legitimate reason for investigating MT, the desk officer, F2B/4, Sarah Knight, recommended that there was no longer a case to justify the telephone and letter intercept on the party's HQ. Her minute went through the management chain. In each case, the line manager agreed with her assessment until it reached Director F. He ordered the desk officer to go and 'make a case'. Under mild protest, she went off to seek out any nuggets of intelligence from the material that had been transcribed. She then squeezed a case for revalidation of the intercept warrant out of it, even where this meant exaggerating the importance of facts and taking them out of context or 'sexing up', as it is now known.

The Home Secretary approved the warrant in ignorance because he simply did not know of the desk officer's reservations or, I suspect, that months of untranscribed tapes had been destroyed.

The illegal and unjustified files

On our TC101 induction courses, David and I were told that MI5 has opened more than a million Personal Files (PFs). We were also exhaustively taken through case studies of incorrect identification. If MI5 were 99.9% accurate in its work that would still mean that there would be over ten thousand files containing information that is factually incorrect. Of course, no organisation is 99.9% accurate and the inaccuracies

would be spread across a much greater number of files. As we had seen on TC101, this was remarkably easy to do. This means that there must be tens of thousands of files in the MI5 archives which contain inaccuracies about British citizens. Even where the information is accurate, its collection and retention is clearly unlawful under the HRA. After all, the difference between a democratic and non-democratic or totalitarian state is that legitimate political dissent and the privacy of those involved is protected in the former and not in the latter. Dame Stella Rimington has — we have already seen — admitted that she thought MI5 was ‘over-enthusiastic’ in its targeting of left-wing activists. David and I can confirm that this is the case.

On one occasion, for example, a schoolboy had written to the Communist Party asking for information for a topic he was preparing at school. His letter was copied (all mail to the CPGB was copied by MI5) and used to create a Personal File (PF), where he was identified before being recorded as a ‘?communist sympathiser’. On another occasion, a man divorcing his wife had written to MI5 claiming she was involved in communism. For that, his wife got a PF again as a ‘?communist sympathiser’. In both cases, the suspect only came to the attention of the service on that one occasion. So why was this information still available to desk officers some twenty years after these individuals had first come to attention, in less than suspicious circumstances?

It is also of enormous concern in a democracy that MI5 continues to hold private information about our elected representatives, which could be used to influence ministers and MPs in secret. In October 2002, The Mail on Sunday reported that Jack Straw had leaked information in connection with the Jeremy Thorpe/Norman Scott affair when he was PPS to Barbara Castle. As this information also features in his PF, we have to ask whether it was used to influence the then Home Secretary’s policy towards hearing David’s evidence, which he has declined to do, and seeing him prosecuted, which he has endorsed.

Even where MI5 was justified in holding files — as in the case of Vladimir Ilych Lenin (PF2) or Leon Trotsky (PF3) who actively worked to undermine this country — it cannot reasonably argue that it must still keep these files and their contents secret. However, the intelligence services are so resistant to scrutiny that these files remain in the registry of MI5’s new HQ, Thames House, even though the their subjects have all been dead for years. MI5 has claimed that opening up these files will reveal sensitive operational techniques. The use of carrier pigeons perhaps?

In fact, the intelligence agencies are in the peculiar position of not just holding files on individuals who no longer pose a notional ‘threat’ but holding files even though the actual threat itself, such as state communism, no longer even exists.

It cannot be therefore ‘necessary in a democracy’ for the services to continue to hold private information about individuals on outdated files, which are still accessible to intelligence operatives. The gravity of this abuse of power is compounded by the fact that the material was unlawfully gathered in the first place.

To comply with the conditions of the HRA, MI5 should notify every individual, on whom a file was created before the passing of the 1989 Security Service Act, that they have a right to remedy, and therefore compensation, for:

- MI5’s initial unlawful invasion of their privacy;

- any interference with their freedoms, such as being blacklisted because of alleged subversive sympathies. There are a number of BBC applicants who were affected by this;
- the service's continued invasion of their privacy by retaining personal information which could be used against them.

Files on public figures

In the course of my work in F2, I came across many files on media figures, celebrities and prominent politicians, particularly when we were asked to research candidates standing in the 1992 General Election. Our job was to summarise MI5's security history of an individual and assess the threat they might pose to national security. F2 management then passed the assessment and summary — but not the original material or file — to the Prime Minister and the leader of the opposition. They would use them when deciding on the suitability of a particular candidate for government or the shadow cabinet. Because the PM or the leader of the opposition did not see the raw intelligence or the detail of the security case against the individual concerned, they were in no real position to make an informed assessment of that individual. It was all too easy for the services to cherry pick intelligence or 'sex up' a case by omission, if they didn't like a prospective minister or thought that his presence in government might mean that MI5 was more closely scrutinised or held to account.

F2, being tucked away in the little-known MI5 building on Bolton Street off Piccadilly, was a relaxed section, with quite an esprit de corps. Consequently, during our time there David and I either personally reviewed or were shown by our colleagues the following PFs. Few of those listed actually belong or belonged to subversive organisations. According to MI5, they have or had 'sympathies' with these or other groups and are therefore worthy of MI5 investigation:

John Lennon, Jack Straw MP, Ted Heath MP, Tam Dalyell MP, Gareth Peirce (solicitor), Jeremy Corbyn MP, Mike Mansfield (barrister), Geoffrey Robertson (barrister), Patricia Hewitt MP, Harriet Harman MP, Garry Bushell (journalist), Peter Mandelson (European commissioner), Peter Hain MP, Clare Short MP, Mark Thomas (comedian), Mo Mowlam (politician), Arthur Scargill (NUM leader, who famously had his own recording category: unaffiliated subversive), Neil Kinnock (politician), Bruce Kent (peace campaigner), Joan Ruddock MP, Owen Oyston (businessman), Cherie Booth aka Blair, Tony Blair MP, David Steel (politician), Teddy Taylor MP, Ronnie Scott (jazz musician), Robin Cook MP, John Prescott MP, Mark Steel (comedian), Jack Cunningham MP, Mohammed Al Fayed (businessman), Mick McGahey (former union leader), Ken Gill (former union leader), Michael Foot (politician), Jack Jones (former union leader), Ray Buxton (former union leader), Hugh Scanlon (former union leader), Harold Wilson (politician), James Callaghan (politician), Richard Norton-Taylor (Guardian journalist).

David and I also came across a file called: 'Subversion in contemporary music', which consisted of press clippings about Crass, then a well-known, self-styled 'anarchist' band; the Sex Pistols; and, rather surprisingly, UB40. You can almost imagine the what's-the-country-coming-to? Colonel Blimp type, opening the file because the Sex Pistols performed shocking songs like 'Anarchy in the UK' — the lyrics of the song were on the file after being snipped from Time Out magazine — and (their version of) 'God Save the Queen'. But does any reasonable person believe that the Sex Pistols were actively trying to damage national security?

Unlawful investigation of non-subversives

The 'subversion' of cabinet ministers Harriet Harman and Patricia Hewitt was to have been leading members of the National Council for Civil Liberties (NCCL — now Liberty), the very organisation designed to protect us from such unwarranted abuses of our liberties. At one point, David came across a series of minutes on a file dating from the early 1980s. They were written by Charles Elwell, a publicly named and notoriously paranoid former head of F2 who saw a red under every bed, and who had successfully argued that members of the executive of the NCCL were recordable as 'suspected sympathiser: Communist', simply for being members of the executive. He based this assumption on the fact that, as one or two leading members of the NCCL had Communist sympathies, the organisation was therefore by definition a Communist front organisation.

This went beyond MI5's own rules. It justified its work against legitimate non-subversive organisations such as trade unions, CND, the NCCL and the Greenham Common women by saying that it was not investigating these organisations or their members per se but was investigating subversive penetration of these groups.

As a result, MI5 gathered ten thick volumes on both the Greenham women and the Campaign for Nuclear Disarmament. Inevitably, as a result of this, F2 gathered personal information on and details of legitimate political activists, which were passed to ministers in official Security Service reports — then known as Box 500 reports — under the guise of revealing subversive penetration of these organisations. The service also had a history of gathering information on trade union activity and industrial disputes on the same basis. However, it again went beyond a strict study of subversive activity, and passed information relating to legitimate industrial protest to ministers and the police.

The decision regarding the Executive of the NCCL meant that MI5 could investigate an individual — that means tap their phones, follow their movements, break into their houses, place a bug in their homes — simply for being a member of the Executive of the NCCL, without having to establish any other connections to communism. This was clearly a breach of democratic rights.

It cannot be 'necessary in a democracy' to investigate the leading members of an organisation charged with upholding democratic rights, in the absence of other security information. Harriet Harman and Patricia Hewitt learnt of the infringement of their rights when former MI5 officer Cathy Massiter blew the whistle on the services in 1984. As a result, they took their case to the European Court of Human Rights (ECtHR) and won because MI5 was not a legally constituted and democratically accountable organisation, the minimum standard in a democracy. It was only as a result of this ruling that Parliament finally put MI5 on a legal footing for the first time and made it accountable to ministers in the 1989 Security Service Act.

F2/URG

While in F2, I also came across files detailing the activities of the Universities Research Group. Although it referred to 'universities' it was only concerned with the activities of alleged communists at Cambridge and Oxford. As late as the mid-1980s, MI5 officers were still interviewing individuals who had been — or were alleged to have been — members of the Cambridge University Communist Party and the Cambridge University Socialist Party in the 1930s and 1940s, the time that Burgess, Philby, Maclean et al were there.

If the individual could establish he had belonged to the Socialist Party, he was cleared of subversive suspicion. Those deemed to have been members of the Communist Party were interviewed and recorded as 'member: subversive; communist' and, if they were still working in public service or the BBC, had their vetting clearance secretly withdrawn. They were then moved to other positions, where they had little or no access to sensitive material.

Considering the damage the Cambridge spy ring did to our national security, it is not surprising that MI5 had an interest in any possible 'fellow travellers'. However, you would have thought that, given the potential gravity of the situation, the service would have treated as a high priority the rapid identification of any further spies from that era. Instead, MI5 was still investigating potential suspects, many of them retired, in the 1980s. They were at the end of their careers, and if any had been spies, the damage would have been done.

How MI5 vetoed Wilson's choice of a Cabinet minister

Another example of MI5's abuse of its powers is the case of Judith Hart, a minister in Harold Wilson's government in the 1970s. She was refused a particular ministerial post because MI5 alleged that she had connections with Communists. Hart denied this and the case became a cause célèbre for the left. Many believed she had been mixed up with another Judith Hart who was a well-known member of the Communist Party. In fact, that is what many assert to the present day.

However, the truth is stranger still. Wilson, ever suspicious of MI5, asked for further details of the 'secret and reliable source' which had reported Hart's connections to Communism. MI5 refused, so Wilson told them he was not prepared to infringe a minister's right to pursue her career in politics without further evidence. After a stand-off, the service reluctantly agreed to furnish Wilson with the raw intelligence in its original form. This was one of the first and only times that a prime minister had seen actual MI5 intelligence. (The little which ministers are usually allowed to see is always summarised, with sources disguised). The intelligence consisted of a couple of transcripts of telephone taps on the Communist Party HQ in King Street. It established that Hart had indeed been in contact with the CP but only to talk to a friend who worked there. As Wilson pointed out to MI5, this was hardly evidence of communist sympathy or connections. He nevertheless agreed to post Hart to a less sensitive area of government.

Creating bureaucracy: the 'Traffic Light' system

As part of our work in F2, David and I had to review the 'traffic light' status of Personal Files (PFs). In the late 1980s, the service set up a system for its files, giving them a green, amber or red card, which dictated whether the service would carry out enquiries. It was largely a bureaucratic exercise, which did nothing to protect civil liberties. In fact, it allowed the service to maintain all its files, rather than destroying them or opening them up to public scrutiny, after their targets had ceased to be of security interest. Red-carded files remained open for inspection by any officer requesting the file, even though red-carding was supposed to mean that the file was closed and the target had not come to attention for twenty or thirty years, in some cases.

The retention of these files also slowed down counter-terrorist investigations because, if officers were trying to identify, say, Patrick Jones, registry would send them files concerning every Patrick Jones or P Jones

the service had ever come across. The desk officer then had to look through these files to 'clear the trace' or confirm that the subject of the file was not identical with the suspect in the investigation. The last thing an officer facing tight investigative deadlines needed was to have to plough through files made in the 1940s on the off chance that one of these communist targets was the same person as an IRA suspect, who had recently come to attention. Interestingly, Jan Taylor and Patrick Hayes, the two Provisional IRA members convicted of the 1992 bombing of Harrods, were both well-known to MI5 for their membership of Red Action, a 'subversive' group which campaigned on Irish Republican issues. MI5 never considered them as suspects for the bombing. They were convicted on the basis of evidence gathered by the Metropolitan Police Anti-Terrorist Squad. I am not criticising MI5 with the benefit of hindsight for failing to apprehend them. I am merely pointing out that a subversive record means nothing in the context of terrorism and is not therefore a reason for retaining files on individuals with 'subversive' records, as some officers in MI5 tried to argue.

As part of review the traffic lighting of files, F2B officers saw some frighteningly anachronistic files. David came across a minute on the minute sheet, which recommended that the target of the file be placed on a certain list because she had been promoted to district organiser of the CPGB. In the event of a state of emergency being declared, anyone holding the office of district organiser or above in the Communist Party was to be detained without trial. We also saw vetting files where individuals were denied promotion or dismissed because they were not "the right sort", or because they had what MI5 called "character defects". As late as 1994, MI5 considered homosexuality, debt and promiscuity as evidence of a defective character.

Failure with IT

Despite the massive reduction in the perceived threat from subversion at this time, MI5 persisted in developing a new national database of 'subversives' in the UK. The computer system, Hawk, had been under development for a number of years by the time I joined F2. As with all MI5 systems, it was an in-house development designed at vast expense by technicians who could not find employment in the more lucrative commercial sector and overseen by an intelligence officer who resented being posted away from a more mainstream line of work. It was anachronistic before it even came online in 1992. However, F2 management still insisted that clerical workers spend valuable man-hours inputting irrelevant data to justify Hawk's development.

Of course, when the study of subversion was eventually shut down in 1996 it became apparent that the technology of Hawk was too out of date to be transferred to other sections in MI5. This was a pattern which could be seen in MI5's IT strategy across the service.

Class War and the Communist Party

David's main area of responsibility in F2 was for the anarchist group Class War and the rump of the Communist Party, which had decided to plug on with Marxism-Leninism, after the rest of the CPGB had renounced it and become the Democratic Left. He was surprised that MI5 still devoted such extensive resources to these groups. During recruitment, he had been told that MI5 was no longer looking in any great depth at subversives. MI5 lore had it that the study of Class War was beefed up in the wake of the Poll Tax riot in London in 1990, after the group's posters and banners were seen on the news coverage.

However, according to Special Branch officers, the violence in Trafalgar Square had started when front-line anti-riot police had lost control and turned on the demonstrators.

By early 1992, Class War was a disorganised collection of around 200 anarchist individuals. As such, it posed no real threat to Parliamentary democracy or national security. F2 had no phone intercept on Class War because it did not have an HQ. However, the authorities did devote considerable resources to the group.

Some years before David had joined F2, a Metropolitan Police Special Duties Section (SDS) agent, code-named M2589, had penetrated Class War. Unlike the vast majority of agents recruited by MI5, he was not a member of an organisation who had been 'turned' by the service. He was a full-time policeman from Special Branch under deep cover. For six days a week, he lived, ate and breathed the life of a class warrior before returning to his normal life with friends and family for a day. Whether Class War merited this kind of resource intensive coverage is open to debate. I quote David:

"When I met M2589 in February 1992, at a safe house in London, it was quite obvious that this peculiar arrangement had affected the agent psychologically. After around four years of pretending to be an anarchist, he had clearly become one. To use the service jargon, he had gone native. He drank about six cans of Special Brew during the debrief, and regaled us with stories about beating up uniformed officers as part of his 'cover'. Partly as a result, he was 'terminated' after the 1992 General Election. Without his organisational skills, Class War fell apart."

Did the agent make Class War more effective while he was there? In other words, did the state actually provide resources, which contributed to the spread of anarchism?

Another anarchist source was run by Daphne. It is doubtful whether any useful information ever came from him, as Daphne spent most of her time acting as his counsellor cum therapist, sorting out problems with his rent, his girlfriends and even having to get worm pills for his dog.

After the 1992 General Election, David carried out two research projects into Class War and the Communist Party of Britain (CPB), which I read after he had left the section because I had taken over the study of the former group. David's research had clearly established that Class War was moribund and recommended that M2589 was not replaced. In practice, this meant that MI5 kept only a 'watching brief' over the group. David came to the same conclusions regarding the CPB. It had fewer than 1,000 members, half of whom were over 65. He recommended the termination of agent M148, who had been reporting on communists for thirty years. M148 had spent nearly his entire working life as an agent.

F2/0, Paul Slough praised David for this work after he left the section, accepting all his recommendations, although I later found that a colleague still in F2, Sarah Knight, had been tasked to copy out his assessments word for word. She explained that although David's work was a thorough, accurate and pertinent research project — and his recommendations had been accepted — it was felt that he was too new to the service to command the necessary authority in his assessments. His work was therefore copied, but presented as her work as she had been in the service longer.

David says:

"It was extremely frustrating not being credited for good work. The Class War research paper did though have a funny side. When I first read the typed draft of the paper I came across the line: 'Class War sees the women's movement as clitist'. Thinking I had taken leave of my senses, I checked it against my handwritten version, which said: 'Class War sees the women's movement as élitist'. God knows what my secretary, an innocent 18-year-old from Essex, thought I was trying to say."

Just before David left F2, he played an anarchist in a police agent running exercise. He was so convincing that a uniformed police officer outside Charing Cross station moved him on, making the exercise more of a challenge to the trainee. On his return to his Bolton Street office, one of the older officers remarked that he had "now seen everything – a member of the officer class wearing an ear-ring" after catching sight of David's ear-ring which had been re-inserted purely for the role play.

Preparations for Provisional IRA (PIRA) primacy

In 1991 and early 1992 expectations had been high within the service that it would be given the lead responsibility for the investigation of the Provisional IRA (PIRA) on the UK mainland. Traditionally the Metropolitan Police Special Branch (MPSB) had the lead and MI5 merely acted in support. In order to ensure that enough officers would be available to form the new section, T2, when primacy was handed to MI5, other sections of MI5 had their staff quotas artificially inflated, particularly in the counter-espionage K branch and counter-subversion F branch.

However, directors' and assistant directors' prestige within the service relied on their staff numbers. So when the call came from the newly formed T2, some senior managers refused to allow their staff to be posted elsewhere. Even though T2 was desperately stretched, directors of other branches regularly turned down requests for help even in the form of temporary secondments.

In May 1992, Home Secretary Kenneth Clarke finally announced to Parliament that MI5 was taking over PIRA investigations in Britain, bringing to an end MPSB's 106-year lead responsibility for Irish Republican matters. MI5 officers were informed of the decision over the office tannoy, as part of an office security announcement. Journalists looking for a quote, it told us, might doorstep us as we left the building because MI5 had been awarded primacy.

As the Provisional IRA were at this time regularly carrying out bombings and endangering the lives of British citizens, it was no longer a proportional – or, indeed, sane – response to continue to deploy vital resources like telephone tapping against Trotskyists rather than terrorists. The service conveniently decided that that subversion no longer posed the same serious threat as it had less than a year before – exactly what we desk officers had been arguing. In August 1992, just nine months after joining the service, David was posted to T2A.

Even though my two years as F2B/5 were up by February 1993, and I had received a performance related bonus and promotion, Director F turned down a request for my transfer from one of T2's senior managers

because he had already seen his empire shrink too much. I finally joined T5E, studying Irish terrorist logistics, in August 1993.

David's and my experiences in F2 had opened our eyes to state abuses of power, which most recruits in the 1990s just did not see. These ranged from the continuing and unlawful existence of files made before 1989, through the absurd files made on the basis of little security information, to the retention of deeply embarrassing personal material on influential figures. Both David and I hoped that this work now belonged to another era and that MI5 was finally ceasing such contentious operations. In the context of subversion, it all begged the question:

"In the 1980s, who really was the Enemy Within?"

Was it the miners struggling to protect their jobs and communities? Or political activists holding meetings, peace demonstrations and standing in elections? Or was it the state, with its undemocratic, unaccountable, law-breaking secret spies?