Trade unionists targeted by spies

AT AN event entitled Undercover Policing and Trade Unions at the University of Greenwich in November, trade unionists, campaigners and academics gathered to hear the state of play of campaigns against blacklisting and state spies in our lives.

Gail Cartmail, Assistant General Secretary of Unite; Helen Steel of the McLibel campaign and Police Spies Out of Lives (www.policespies- soutolives.org.uk); journalists Rob Evans and Phil Chamberlain; former MP Dave Nellist; Dave Smith of the Blacklist Support Group and many more spoke at the event.

We focussed mainly on the story that started in 1968 when the Special Demonstration Squad was formed within the Metropolitan Police. It eventually had 140 undercover officers infiltrating and reporting on around 1000 groups, including trade unions, the Labour Party and environmental campaigns. A number of the undercover police started relationships and families with women involved with the campaigns they were “investigating”. The SDS operated until at least 2010 – and is now Metropolitan Police unit SO15.

Dave Smith told of a blacklist set up by major construction employers to prevent trade unionists getting work in the industry. He highlighted how evidence came to light showing the police had been providing the employers’ blacklisting organisation the Consulting Association with information on trade unionists, helping it prevent them getting work. As Dave said: “I was a trade unionist trying to stop people being killed at work, or concerned about asbestos, or helping people get their unpaid wages – not a terrorist!”

Helen Steel and others told of the devastating effect of finding out that their partners were or had been undercover police officers working against the interests of the causes they supported.

Much information about the issues covered by the event was made available on the day, which saw the launch of www.spycops.co.uk – other excellent sources of information are linked from the online version of this article.

Attendees were clear that the state had treated trade unionists and campaigners going about lawful activities not as democratic opponents but as political enemies – and that this was a wrong which future governments should address.

The government’s Undercover Policing Inquiry into all this is taking forever to progress even to the public evidence stage. The conference was concerned that the issue is likely to be kicked into the long grass if there isn’t a major injection of political will to see its work completed fully and properly.

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See report of a Branch meeting with a lawyer representing targets of undercover policing at www.londonfreelance.org/ fl/1607ucpi.html

Election monitoring and NUJ Councils

THE FREELANCE is collecting data on any cases in which journalists have been pressured to report on the General Election in a particular way. Please let us know of any such incidents, to election@londonfreelance.org in confidence. If you say we may, we will share the results with the Campaign for Press and Broadcasting Freedom (North), which is producing an Election Watch briefing – see www.coldtype.net/MediaNorth.html or subscribe to their email list at cpbfnorth@outlook.com.

Another election is still open for voting: that to the NUJ’s Councils, including its highest decision-making body, the National Executive Council (NEC), and its Industrial Councils representing various demographics and industrial sectors.

Full members of the NUJ should have received their ballots – along with statements from candidates – by 12 December. If you don’t, contact elections@nuj.org.uk – your completed ballot has to be posted to arrive at the NUJ by second class post before 29 January 2020.

Some candidates are LFB members and/or have been nominated by LFB.

Brexit update: uncertainty, but Settled Status app for iPhone

THE UK is now set to leave the EU either around 31 January, or later – or not. This is all subject to the outcome of the 12 December General Election. NUJ members who are EU nationals resident in the UK have until 31 December 2020 to register via the EU Settlement Scheme in the event that the UK leaves without concluding a Withdrawal Agreement with the EU, or 30 June 2021 if such a deal is concluded. This depends largely on the General Election.

Meanwhile, some good news: since the end of October the EU Exit: 1D Document Check app, through which EU nationals will have to apply for Settled Status, now seems to work on iPhones as well as Android. You’ll need an iPhone 7 or later.

There has still been no “primary legislation” put before the UK Parliament to formally guarantee the rights of EU nationals.

Back in October, Guy Verhofstadt, European Parliament coordinator on matters relating to Brexit, warned that the European Parliament’s acceptance of the latest version of the Withdrawal Agreement was conditional on “further assurances… received over the UK government’s treatment of EU citizens, including 200,000 people who are regarded as being vulnerable”.

In the same month the Lower House of the Dutch Parliament wrote to the Minister for Exiting the European Union expressing concern at the plight of self-employed EU nationals in the UK post-Brexit. The letter expressed a fear that draft secondary legislation due to be enacted after the UK left the EU would mean “after exit day, EU citizens would no longer be able to be self-employed… in the UK on the same basis as British citizens”.

This lack of any concrete guarantees for EU nationals in the UK also affects the many UK nationals resident in the EU. Many EU member states have draft legislation guaranteeing the rights of UK nationals after Brexit, ready to go to their legislature, but conditional on “reciprocity” regarding treatment of their nationals in the UK. This has not been forthcoming from the UK, leaving many UK nationals in EU member states in a state of uncertainty.

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Video consortium

London Freelance Branch again hosted the Video Consortium on 11 November (above). See our report at www.londonfreelance.org/fl/1912vc.html

Photo © Sara Varga (@saravargaphoto on Instagram)

Reviving radicalism

THE ANNUAL Claudia Jones Memorial Lecture, organised by the NUJ Black Members’ Council, commemorates the Trinidadian-born journalist who was deported from the US for her political activism, and who was instrumental in establishing the first Notting Hill Carnival. This year’s lecture took place in October, during Black History Month. Academic and author Professor Kehinde Andrews spoke on the subject of “Reviving radicalism”. He cited Claudia as the perfect example of what radicalism is. There’s a 30-minute video of the lecture at www.nuj.org.uk/news/nuj-claudia-jones-memorial-2019