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The Met sychief who infiltrated Freedom Press

Freedom News

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<https://freedomnews.org.uk/2018/03/24/roger-pearce-infiltrated-freedom-press/>

Exclusive investigation by Freedom News on one of their former members.

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We are now asking around Belfast comrades to see if anyone remembers his visit – or whether he resurfaced later in his deployment period, up to 1984. Please get in touch if you do!

Exclusive: The Met spychief who infiltrated Freedom Press

After an investigation tracking his articles through the paper and talking to old comrades, Freedom can today reveal at least some of the story of former spycop Roger Pearce as he used our paper to worm his way into Northern Ireland.

Earlier this week it was disclosed that Freedom Press would now be considered a core participant in the Undercover Policing Inquiry, following official confirmation that Pearce had operated as “Roger Thorley,” a former writer for Freedom in the 1970s and ’80s.

Having looked through the Freedom archive and cross-checked with former collective members, Freedom can confirm that Pearce, writing under the moniker R.T, penned a series of articles over the course of the period 1980-81 and then joined a fact-finding mission to Belfast, before disappearing from sight.

Most of these essays were dryly written, but heavily critical assessments of the policing and justice systems with a focus on the situation in Northern Ireland, suggesting among other things that IRA members detained by Britain should be treated as political prisoners — a major and controversial demand of Republican combatants at the time. Pearce qualified as a barrister with Middle Temple in 1979, meaning he was ideally placed to act as an “expert voice” on such matters when putting forward such articles for publication.

The strong implication, and one which Freedom is investigating, is that Pearce was using the paper as a way to contact and assess British connections with the radical community in Northern Ireland in a period of crisis. The news will strengthen the case for an expansion of the inquiry into the region, as Pearce joins other undercovers with links to Northern Ireland and would go on to become the Met’s Director of Intelligence and head of Special Branch from 1998-2003.

Have pen, will travel

Anarchists who were active at the time do not, for the most part, remember Pearce very well – he seems to have kept a relatively low profile – and as far as can be told he was never an active editor at the paper. Some memories do survive however, which fit with what we now know to have become the standard operating procedure for Met infiltration of perfectly legal, poorly resourced organisations.

Dressed up with Trotskyish glasses and a goatee, Pearce was conspicuously “useful” as a car driver prepared to give people lifts (this is a recurring theme from spycops) and one comrade remembers that he was the “unofficial chauffeur” of Leah Feldman, a grandee of earlier times in the movement who, it was said, had been at the funeral of Peter Kropotkin 60 years earlier. Other memories place him as having a girlfriend who was also an activist, though this can’t be confirmed.

What can be confirmed is that when inquiry head Mitting defined Pearce’s writing as “virulently anti-police” he wasn’t exaggerating – and it was specifically in favour of the IRA. In one article, Prisoners of Politics (Vol 41, No. 22, Nov 8th 1980) the editors debate “R.T” over his demand that IRA detainees should have political prisoner status, noting that “all prisoners are political”. In another he attacks the arrest of Peter Sutcliffe, the Yorkshire Ripper, as “difficult to evaluate in terms of sheer blatant prejudice and hysteria,” comparing him to Provisional IRA man Gerard Tuite.

But it is R.T’s final article which should raise the most eyebrows. In The Not So Distant Struggle (Vol 42 No. 19, Sep 26th 1981) he reports back from a fact-finding mission to Belfast that he had inveigled himself onto, along with four other members of the Freedom Collective. The consummate London police spy’s empathetic report on the Troops Out phenomenon, which suggests a close working relationship with the then-active Belfast Anarchist Collective, notes:

Within a short distance of Britain we are daily witnessing a most repressive regime whose intensity supports no comparison with life in London; a regime where there is near total monitoring of movement day and night, where constant use is made of the Prevention of Terrorism Act to detain and prosecute ‘political offenders’, where the overt presence of armed forces often reaches saturation point, where prisoners are condemned by juryless Diplock courts, and where widespread condemnation has been directed internationally, particularly from America.

This was a man so embedded in the heart of that “repressive regime” he would rise to high office, ringmaster to the many other liars and manipulators of that force in their efforts to destroy resistance in Belfast and beyond. A paid-up member of the British state writing to the public that:

Ideological scruples must not be allowed to erode the clear responsibility of focusing attention on what has become the embodiment of the repressive state visibly at work in utilising all its resources, using the streets of Belfast, Derry and elsewhere as a prime testing ground for future urban unrest in Britain.

In doing so, the striking image of people demanding to determine their own existence emerges not just from individual IRA actions, but rather from the close communities of which the IRA guerrillas are an indissoluble part.

It’s an analysis many anarchists and leftists would agree with, then and now. But for an agent of the Crown, misleading would be an understatement.