

Spying on the Communist Party of England (Marxist-Leninist)

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Infiltration by the state in the workers' movement has a long pedigree, and within living memory there are numerous examples of the surveillance, manipulation and disruption of independent political organising that challenges the status quo regardless of its political allegiance. The flowering of protest in the late 1960s and 70s in Britain saw a vibrant and varied opposition that attracted the concealed attention of state agents. One element of the security apparatus, Special Branch, has had the lens focused upon its practices when spying on the Left, including the newly emergent forces of the anti-revisionist Marxist-Leninists in Sixties' Britain through infiltration by field officers. The Special Demonstration Squad (SDS) was a covert unit under Special Branch supervision that existed within the Metropolitan Police Service between 1968 and 2008. So far the cover names of 45 out of a total of at least 144 undercover officers have been disclosed during the official Undercover Policing Inquiry. The tale of one anonymous clandestine spy, assigned the designation HN13, is an

incomplete record through reports submitted on the marginal Far Left Communist Party of England (Marxist-Leninist). [\[i\]](#)

DC HN13 was an experienced officer. He joined the Police Force in the late 1960s and the Branch in the early 1970s, then approached in 1974 to join the Special Demonstration Squad. Married with young children, there were no disclosures of improprieties involving, as with other undercover SDS field officers, seducing and fathering children of targeted activists. Prior to his deployment the CPEml had a name for headlong rushes into confrontations; whether Barry/ Desmond Loader was acting as 'agent provocateurs' is unknown however he was twice prosecuted for public order offences in his false cover name and convicted once. Despite this, the Undercover Policing Inquiry Chair, John Mitting, stated that there is no known allegation of misconduct during the deployment.

His widow confirmed in a very brief statement that he stole his cover surname from a deceased child from Wiltshire, and that he had told her of the surname during his deployment into the Communist Party of England (Marxist-Leninist) from 1975 to 1978. [\[ii\]](#)

Active in the East London Branch, Loader was also an active member of the Party's cultural activities offshoot, the Progressive Cultural Association (PCA), and the East London Peoples Front, and the Outer East London Anti-Fascist Anti-Racist Committee. DC HN13's reports provide a flavour of the activity and demands placed upon the activists of the CPEml in the period he was spying on them. Evidence of hype-activism that brunt out cadre evident in the singular account of attending a social, going back afterwards for a meeting that lasts into the early hours

of next morning and then volunteering to provide the materials for a morning leafletting session!

He also filed reports on the activities of the Communist Unity Association (Marxist-Leninist).

Pictured below PCA leader, and CPEml Central Committee member , the composer Cornelius *Cardew* (1936-1981).



Confrontations with the Police

In the 1970s, members of the CPE had a reputation for rushing at police lines in demonstrations, seemingly without strategic consideration, that served to raise the group's profile in relation to the police – and the CPEml became a target for Special Branch.

Party comrades who were leafleting were 'brutally attacked' whilst by the police at a demonstration in East Street market in South East London in 1972. Several received prisons sentence.

The CPEmI placed the confrontations and violence within an environment of a decaying capitalism:

Whilst increasing fascist legislation, the monopoly capitalists are also stepping up their harassment of working people and progressive organisations. In the last couple of years, large numbers of progressive people have been harassed, intimidated and attacked by the British police. Last December, some supporters of the Communist Party of England (Marxist-Leninist) were attacked by the London police and planted with drugs, ammunition, explosives and have been committed to trial at the Old Bailey on concocted charges. Comrade Lindsay Hutchinson, an active supporter of the Communist Party of England (Marxist-Leninist), is at present serving a five year sentence on concocted charges of "malicious wounding" and "assault". Many other progressive people and Irish patriots living in England have been given jail sentences of up to 30 years on concocted charges. Many workers pickets have been fascistically attacked by the police who encourage strike breakers to break the picket lines and attack striking workers: and working people have been murdered by the police. Is this not violence and terror of the highest order? [\[iii\]](#)

Following a police raid on a 'house used by comrades and fabricated evidence', in January 1974, four members of the party were found guilty of possession of petrol bombs and assaulting police. They received 12-month sentences for possession of petrol bombs and were fined for assaulting police.

Also in 1973/74, several party members were arrested for the (again, fabricated) charge of the theft of roof lead, after their car was stopped on Queens Town Road, Battersea.

Given the confrontational experience of members that saw members arrested (and identified) it comes as no surprise that Barry Loader's reports are peppered with references on proposals by the Communist Party of England (Marxist-Leninist) to launch a campaign on behalf of its members on bail for offences arising from various demonstrations, and to organise pickets outside courts such as Redbridge Magistrates' Court. This defence of democratic rights campaigning prove both time-consuming and energy sapping, with ramifications on the lives of members. Commenting in July 1978 on arrests at an Irish demonstration in Birmingham the previous May, Loader reported CPEmI policy was that *"although imprisonment is to be seen as a means of taking the political line into prisons, leading members should remain free to carry on their function within the Party."* Adding, "It is also likely that the cost of her appeal will be met from Central Party funds."

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STRUGGLE FOR DEMOCRATIC RIGHTS ISOLATES CLASS ENEMY!

Following the fascist attack by the Birmingham city police on the March 27th demonstration in support of the usual liberation struggle of the Irish people, progressive people have formed the MARCH FOR DEMOCRATIC RIGHTS COMMITTEE. This Committee is formed to defend the democratic rights of the people fascistically attacked and unjustifiably arrested and defend the fundamental democratic rights of the working and oppressed people to discuss and disseminate progressive political ideas, particularly in the Bull Ring in Birmingham where this latest crime of the lackey police was committed.

The Committee produced a statement on the events of March 27th and distributed 5,000 copies in Birmingham. The statement was distributed

struggle for democratic rights on March 27th had isolated the enemy and gained the widespread support of the broad masses of the people. This was shown concretely by the fact that for all their bloody death threats against the distributors, the lackey police didn't dare to do anything but bluster around taking out their notebooks.

Beset with insoluble contradictions at home and abroad, British monopoly capital is in irretrievable decline. Heading for its doom, it is trying to pass the burden of its collapse onto the backs of the working people and impose fascism on them. The English working class and people have a glorious history of struggle against fascism and are standing on against the reaction of the



No Platform and Anti-Fascism

In the 1970s across higher education campuses, students launched a number of protests at right-wing and fascist speakers. These incidents in the early 1970s were a 'prelude' to what became known as 'No Platforming' such speakers.

One well-publicised incident allegedly involved student members of the CPE from Birmingham and elsewhere:

On 8 May 1973, the psychologist Hans Eysenck, whose theories were rooted in the controversial theory of eugenics, attempted to deliver a lecture at the London School of Economics, but faced heavy protests from students. A group of Maoists stormed the stage and assaulted Eysenck.

The CPE (M-L) was also vocal and active in broader anti-fascist politics during the 1970s and early 1980s at a time when National Front was a rising force on the street and sometimes at the ballot box. During this time the NF was successfully challenged on the street by a variety of anti-fascist groups.

In 1974, the CPEml were also present at the Red Lion Square counter-fascist demo during clashes between anti-fascists and the police took place. During this violent confrontation, one protester Kevin Gately received severe head injuries from which he died. Members of the party also gave evidence at the subsequent public inquiry into the incident – which was chaired by Lord Scarman.

Loader reported on people involved in actions against the National Front (NF), such as the organisation of demonstrations, pickets, and leafletting

and confronting the NF directly. Barry Loader attended the counter-NF demonstration, the Battle of Lewisham on 13 August 1977. He was injured during the event, receiving a blow to the head – the first of the two times he was assaulted by uniformed police.

Internal Special Branch documents show that Loader met to share his experience and provide recommendations for methods of policing future demonstrations with Deputy Assistant Commissioner along with Peter Collins (HN303), DCI Pryde and DI Willingale following the Lewisham demonstration. [\[iv\]](#)

ARRESTED TWICE & 'BATTERED' BY POLICE AGAIN

Loader was arrested twice while in his cover identity. The first occasion, in late 1977, was for 'insulting or threatening behaviour' following a clash with the NF outside Barking police station. Chief Inspector Craft of the SDS recorded that Loader was 'somewhat battered by police prior to his arrest' [\[v\]](#)

Seven other individuals from Loader's group were also arrested. Superintendent Pryde maintained contact with a court official during the proceedings in April 1978. He informed them that one of the defendants was a police informant who they would be 'anxious to safeguard from any prison sentence' [\[vi\]](#)

Ultimately, the charges against Loader were dismissed. Three of the other seven individuals were found guilty and fined on 12 April 1978 [\[vii\]](#)

SECOND ARREST

Just three days after his court appearance, Loader was arrested a second time during trouble at a National Front meeting held at Loughborough School, Brixton on 15 April 1978.

He was again charged with threatening behaviour under s.5 of the Public Order Act 1936, along with three others [\[viii\]](#)

At the hearing, an application was made to hear all the defendants' cases together. However, the Magistrates decided to hear Loader's case alone. This was, allegedly, because Loader had been involved in a separate incident to the other defendants, who had infiltrated an NF meeting while Loader stayed outside.

In fact, records reveal that Superintendent Pryde established contact with a court official during the proceedings and told them that one of the defendants was:


'a valuable informant in the public order field whom we would wish to safeguard from a prison sentence should the occasion arise'.

Unlike the previous arrest, however, it is noted that Loader's cover name was specifically given to the official [\[ix\]](#)

All the defendants, in this case, were found guilty, with Loader being fined and given a one-year bind-over of £100. It is noted in the Minute Sheet that this sentence was considered 'very useful' as it would allow Loader to keep a low profile for the remainder of his deployment [\[x\]](#)

It was not all confrontations on days out in the CPEml. Other activities included in loader's reports map out the activists' busy schedule of meetings and commitments. From supplying accounts of private meetings of the East London Branch of the Communist Party of England (Marxist-Leninist) held at Barking Polytechnic, various planning meetings to small social gatherings, the files of Special Branch were filled with minutiae of undercover intelligence gathering, including the gossip about individuals from CPEml and Indian Workers Movement living together thought worthy of inclusion in Special Branch's intelligence files, along with reports on individual "comrades", an active member of the Communist Party of England (Marxist-Leninist) who failed to attend court on charges of assault, and his efforts to avoid arrest moving to Canada and changing his name. Loader providing a description of his current appearance for the files.

A National Conference of the CPE(ML) on the anniversary of the October Revolution to be held in Birmingham at the YMCA, late October 1977 drew the attention of SDS coordinating with West Midlands Special Branch even though they acknowledged, *"There is no public order issue involved"*. Photographic surveillance was arranged, it was *"hoped that a good identification of national membership and information on the future policies of the C.P.E. -M.L. will result."* [xi]



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The attendance was estimated at around 200 and included SDS Field Officer, HN13 “Desmond /Barry Loader” who was well-practiced on reporting on the CPE (ML).

Among the SDS reports put into the public domain when released by the Public Inquiry included those on open public events, of both the CPEml and its associated organisations (like the Progressive Cultural Association, PCA) when Loader took the opportunity to purloined the contact sheet from PCA events and names were cross referenced with existing Special Branch files [\[xii\]](#)

There were also internal PCA evening meetings, such as that held 15th May 1977 in Belsize Park NW3 attended by 30. Others covered a meeting of the Progressive Cultural Association to discuss its activities in a proposed anti-monarchy campaign.

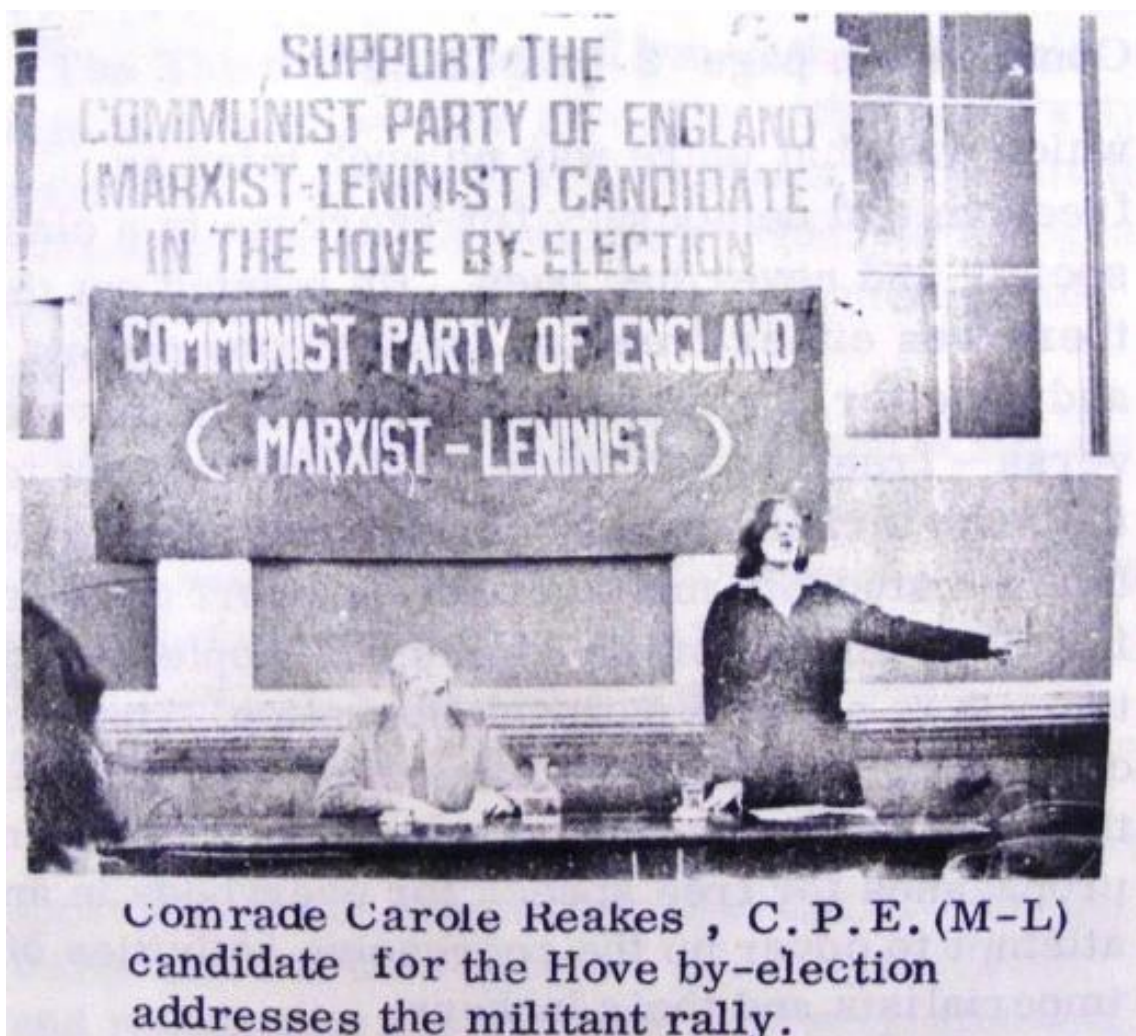
In July 1977 a report submitted on a meeting of the Communist Party of England (Marxist-Leninist) held under the broad front-group name of Outer East London Anti-Fascist Anti-Racist with Indian Defence Committee in Ilford. When that faltered CPEml broad front activities were consolidated in a new organisation, entitled the People’s Front.

By February 1978 Loader reported the CPEml was engaged in a “*rigorous self-examination*” with the leadership conscious of drift within the organisation.

The previous Christmas 1977, as an “alternative to the feudal, bourgeois Christian festival”, a national meeting of CPEml had been arranged

December 23rd to January 1st. (A not uncommon gesture as another group arranged a Standing Committee meeting for Christmas Day morning!).

Some 60 persons were present in Birmingham (referred to as new centre of CPEml). However, the context of the systematic shift in political allegiance and political identification with the positions of the Party of Labour of Albania are missing from the Special Branch reports. Its historic First Congress was held in 1978. [\[xiii\]](#)



Much of the main address given by Carol Reakes was published as an extract in issue 63 of *Workers Weekly*. At the previous October 1977 Birmingham conference on Trotskyism, she told members that what was needed was “*considerable improvements needed*” in the regularly,

distribution and study of the paper, *Workers' Weekly*. A familiar exhortation on the Left.

The emphasis on building an industrial base, the organisation of the masses around one party (them), developing a leading role in the anti-fascist/anti-racist struggle and the 'Bolshevization' of the CP Eml especially in relation to its internal discipline. All these themes occurred at this time across the spectrum of anti-revisionist Marxist-Leninist groups in Britain. In London the CP Eml's emphasis was Ford's at Dagenham. The more industrially established Communist Party of Britain (ML) was identified as the organisation's main Left opponent in this period.

What was announced was the formation of the 'Little Red Guards', despite the misgivings of a minority, Barry Loader reported to Special Branch that "*their inaugural ceremony involved the receiving of a red scarf (to be worn when meeting) an address from Carol REAKES on the significance of their role and the singing of revolutionary children's songs*". Some 12 children are "believed to be involved" age range 4-10 years. They will meet on a Saturday "*to be given a 'low key' political talk in the morning on basic issues, such as evolution and the history of labour in the morning, and in the afternoon taken on an outing to places of interests, such as the docks or a ferry crossing.*"

January 1978 saw a joint Indian Workers Movement/CP Eml East London branch meeting to "denounce the sham of India's Republic Day" (January 28th), and after the mobilisation for the "Bloody Sunday Commemoration march, an evening concert organised by PCA at the Trinity Community Centre, East Avenue E12 under the slogan "British Imperialism Out of Ireland!"

Commensurate with significant anti-fascist activity, there was a probable fascist attack on the election headquarters of the South London People's Front in the 1978 Lambeth Central by-election. Coincidentally, going against the documentary evidence of Barry Loader's infiltration, the recollection of Michael Chant, the current party General Secretary, was that Loader did not appear until 1978 at election hustings in for the constituency of central Lambeth where Stuart Monro stood under 'South London People's Front'. Michael Chant recalled that:

"In the Lambeth Central by-election of 1978, Stuart Monro stood as a candidate representing the South London People's Front, supported by CPE(ML). A campaign centre was set up in a private house in Stockwell, where mailing out of election leaflets, organising of canvassers, and other activities took place. It was only at this time that Barry Loader [...] appeared and offered to help. Given he had no known links to any progressive activity and his general bearing, he was immediately suspected of being an undercover policeman. However, following Lenin's dictum to put suspected spies to useful, but not compromising work, he was assigned to washing-up duties in the kitchen, large-scale cooking being required to feed the election volunteers. Loader carried out his duties diligently, but was not invited to any discussions or to participate in any planning activities. When the election period ended, he disappeared, and a visit to the address he had given revealed only an empty bed-sit."

A post-script to Loader's career was that a note made of a meeting with Commander Buchanan in 2013 suggests that Loader had difficulty reintegrating with the police following his deployment [\[xiv\]](#)

The successor party to the CPE, the Revolutionary Communist Party of Britain (Marxist-Leninist) were later infiltrated by another SDS officer Malcolm Shearing (alias) between 1981 and 1985. [\[xv\]](#)

ENDNOTES

[\[i\]](#) These notes on HN13 – known as ‘Barry’ rather than ‘Desmond’ by former CPEml members – and his activities draws heavily from the work undertaken by the [Undercover Research Portal](#) at Powerbase – investigating corporate and police spying on activists.

Undercover Policing Inquiry [released Special branch documents](#) in May 2021 related to the activity of HN13 cover names “Desmond Loader/Barry loader”, an active member of the Special Demonstration Squad (1975-19778) assigned to infiltrate and spy upon the Communist Party of England (Marxist-Leninist) .

Indispensable is the ongoing independent work produced by both Dónal O’Driscoll of [Undercover Research Group](#) and journalist Rob Evans on the Spycops.

[\[ii\]](#) Released file MPS-0740967

[\[iii\]](#) *Worker’s England Daily News Release*, September 4, 1973 <https://www.marxists.org/history/erol/uk.hightide/real-terror.htm>

[\[iv\]](#) Released file MPS-0732886

[\[v\]](#) Released file MPS-0722618

[\[vi\]](#) Released file MPS-0526784

[\[vii\]](#) Released file UCPI0000011984

[\[viii\]](#) Released file UCPI0000011356

[\[ix\]](#) Released file MPS-0526784

[\[x\]](#) Released file MPS-0526784

[\[xi\]](#) Special Branch memorandum 28th October 1977. Released file MPS-0730696

[\[xii\]](#) Special Branch 8th September 1977 ref:400/76/166

[\[xiii\]](#) <https://www.marxists.org/history/erol/uk.hightide/cpe-historic.pdf>

[\[xiv\]](#) Released file MPS-0738057

[\[xv\]](#) [https://powerbase.info/index.php/Malcolm_Shearing_\(alias\)](https://powerbase.info/index.php/Malcolm_Shearing_(alias))