



# **Activist Trauma Support**

## **Police Infiltrators - the ultimate betrayal**

The news that people we knew, trusted, worked with and loved are not who we thought they were, has come as a shock to many people.

For some, it has meant that close and intimate relationships were not what they seemed, representing a massive personal betrayal.

Others may not have known the police infiltrators so closely, or even at all, but the news can still have a big impact on us, as individuals, groups and movements.

This information aims to recognise the range of impacts that the discovery of police infiltrators may have on us personally. Of course people had different relationships with the police spies. On top of this we are all unique in our personalities, backgrounds and personal situations. This means that the news will affect us all differently.

Activist Trauma Support doesn't claim to have any easy answers about how to respond, but with this information we aim to acknowledge the ways in which we might feel, while offering recognition, validation and support to those affected.

We would also welcome any feedback as to how we could better provide support on this issue.

### **What impact might the discovery of police infiltrators have on us?**

We may be affected in a number of ways. For many of us the news represents a loss – of faith, trust, friendship – and as with other forms of loss such as a bereavement or the end of a relationship, collective or campaign, we'll go through a number of stages. In this sense our feelings will change as time goes on. We may notice:

-feeling sad, tearful

-feeling hollow, empty, numb

-not really believing what's happened

-feeling angry, with the infiltrators, or with yourself or your friends for not suspecting, or if you did suspect for not doing anything about it

-blaming or questioning yourself and your actions, or blaming other people

-feeling ashamed or guilty

-feeling anxious or fearful for the future, or worried about what may be known about you

With the news of these widespread betrayals, and the knowledge that there are probably more undercover police in our movement, it can also be hard to trust people. We may become suspicious of each other and particularly of people new to the movement. We may be more closed in our organising or may have been put off political activity altogether.

Some of us might also be unhappy about the way in which different people have dealt with what has happened – for example speaking to the media, taking legal action, or not doing these things. This can serve to further divide us. But we should recognise that these responses will affect people in various ways, and that those who were closer to the infiltrators may have needs and wishes that differ from those who knew them less well.

We may also have more positive feelings which are also normal and ok! For example, you might be glad that the infiltrators have been identified, or that they've been identified in the media, or that the police's tactics have been made public.

### **What can we do?**

The feelings we experience are normal, and it is important to accept them and to be kind to ourselves. This might mean taking some time out, or finding time to relax. As with any sort of stress, remember to stay healthy – getting enough exercise, eating properly and trying to get enough sleep. If you're finding it hard to trust people, this can be quite isolating – think about whether there's anyone you feel able to talk to about how you're feeling. The chances are that other people will feel the same sometimes. Try to spend time with other people, perhaps doing neutral activities. Allow yourself to shout and cry!

A lot of people were fooled by Mark, Lynn and the others. We need to realise that it's not our fault. These were well-trained people who led double lives and did a lot to gain people's trust. Look out for thoughts containing 'shoulds' or 'oughts' – 'I should have seen through her' or 'I ought to have known' or 'I should have raised my suspicions'. Try to be fair on yourself – 'What would I say to a friend who was thinking like that?'

For some of us, it's not the first time that our trust has been breached. The news may be particularly hard to take if it's a reminder of difficult past experiences, or if there are other parts of your life that don't feel safe. If this is making things particularly hard for you, try to find someone to talk to about it.

If you know someone who's been affected by police infiltration, recognise that they may be experiencing any of the emotions listed above, and give them space to express themselves and their feelings. Ask them what they need, and respect their wishes in terms of any legal, political or media-related action that they wish to

take. There's probably no one right answer in terms of how to respond to these discoveries, but it's important not to further isolate one another even if we disagree with each other's tactics. There needs to be a balance between keeping an open discussion and negotiation of how to respond, and allowing privacy to those who need it - this can be hard to strike when an issue is so emotive and affects people around the world.

The reality is that the police do have an interest in political movements and there are security risks now and in the future. However it's important to weigh the risks and benefits of security measures – this will depend on what you're doing and the nature of your group or work. The majority of the people we come across are not police spies and a culture of suspicion can have just as negative an impact on our movement as that of the police having insider knowledge.

### **What support is available?**

If you or someone you know is experiencing significant distress as a result of police infiltration, it might be helpful to talk to someone who is outside of your immediate circles. Talking therapy may be helpful - however it may feel difficult to seek help from mainstream services who can sometimes find it hard to understand your circumstances or involvement in activism.

A good therapist should be non-judgemental and able to help anyway – but this is not everyone's experience.

Activist Trauma Support can be contacted for help with finding the right support – we may be able to help ourselves, put you in touch with a sympathetic professional, or help you to think about what questions to ask or things to think about when seeking support.

We are also available to 'support the supporters' – so please get in touch if that applies to you.

You can contact us by email or telephone. The phone is not always switched on but we check for messages regularly and will get back to you within a couple of days.

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