

British government admits MI5 enjoys carte blanche to break the law

By Simon Whelan
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“ This attempted murder using a weapons-grade nerve agent in a British town was not just a crime against the Skripals. It was an indiscriminate and reckless act against the United Kingdom, putting the lives of innocent civilians at risk. ”

This was one of the many statements by UK Prime Minister Theresa May accusing Russia, without any credible evidence being made available, of committing crimes on British soil with the “attempted assassination” of Sergei and Yulia Skripal.

The mendacity of May and the British ruling elite—who have universally backed her claims—knows no bounds. The accusations against Russia were made as it was finally admitted that MI5 (Military Intelligence section five—Britain’s domestic intelligence agency) is permitted to carry out criminal activity.

Earlier this month, after a seven-month legal battle by human rights groups Reprieve and Privacy International, the May government revealed that, under a previously secret order, MI5 is entitled to break the law and to commit crimes in pursuit of its aims.

In a written statement to Parliament on March 1, May said she had instructed Lord Justice Fulford, the investigatory powers commissioner (IPC), to “keep under review the application of the security service guidelines on the use of agents who participate in criminality and the authorisations issued in accordance with them”.

The direction to the IPC is entitled “security service participation in criminality.” The one-page text instructs the IPC to oversee the participation of MI5 officers in criminal activity under a previously secret order known as the “third direction.”

Had the legal case not been mounted by Reprieve and Privacy International, it is likely that the ministerial

order would never have seen the light of day—as it has remained secret since it was first written into law in 2014.

After the announcement, a solicitor for Privacy International, Millie Graham Wood, asserted, “Had we not sought to challenge the government over the failure to publish this direction, together with Reprieve, it is questionable whether it would have ever been brought to light. It is wrong in principle for there to be entire areas of intelligence oversight and potentially of intelligence activity, about which the public knows nothing at all.”

The government directive covers the operations of what they call “Covert Human Intelligence Sources [CHIS],” who are trained to provide intelligence on British citizens deemed a threat to national security and worthy of attention by the state.

The government attempted to keep even the few paragraphs released under lock and key, arguing that publication would damage national security. The guidance itself, concerning when British spies can commit crimes, and how far they are able to go, remains confidential.

In 2016, a report published by Intelligence Services Commissioner Sir Mark Waller clearly hinted at the fact that MI5 is authorised to commit criminal activity. Headed “Agent Participation in the Commission of an Offence,” it stated, “Agents are one of the most significant information gathering assets we have.”

It continued, “There may be occasions where a CHIS participates in a criminal offence in order to gather the required intelligence, for example, membership of a proscribed organisation or handling stolen goods.”

Reprieve and Privacy International are demanding that the full security service guidelines be published.

After the note was released, Reprieve’s Maya Foa

said, “After a seven-month legal battle the prime minister has finally been forced to publish her secret order but we are a long way from having transparency. The public and parliament are still being denied the guidance that says when British spies can commit criminal offences and how far they can go. Authorised criminality is the most intrusive power a state can wield. Theresa May must publish this guidance without delay.”

May will do no such thing. The British state has zero intention of revealing their modus operandi of dirty state operations.

Even the minute amount released reveals that there is one rule book for working people and another for MI5 and the intelligence agencies. While workers and young people are being incarcerated at an accelerated rate for even petty crimes, the forces of the state have carte blanche for their lawless operations.

The acknowledgement of an official sanction for state operatives to behave criminally in pursuit of their nefarious aims received only cursory attention in the media, which merely noted that the document was now in the public domain.

MI5 has been involved in subverting democracy by spying, criminal collusion, conspiracy, infiltration and political provocation. Its main target has been the working class, especially the socialist movement.

Former MI5 operative and dyed-in-the-wool anti-communist Peter Wright detailed some of its activities, but by no means all of them, in his 1987 book *Spycatcher*. In the book, Wright described how he and his colleagues in MI5 “bugged and burgled” their way across London and the UK.

He detailed “black bag” operations carried out by the agency against the Labour government of Harold Wilson in the 1960s and 1970s. It is now well documented that MI5 had its dirty digits all over a plot during the early 1970s to organise secret fascistic paramilitary forces and private armies to overthrow Wilson and install Lord Mountbatten as the head of an extreme right-wing military dictatorship.

Spycatcher, whose publication the Tory government of Prime Minister Margaret Thatcher attempted to suppress at the time, revealed that the British state spied upon and infiltrated agents into the forerunners of the Socialist Equality Party in the UK—the Socialist Labour League (SLL) and the Workers Revolutionary

Party (WRP).

Wright revealed that MI5 boasted of effectively running the Communist Party of Great Britain—such was the depth of their agents’ penetration into the party. Subsequently, MI5 turned more of their resources to what Wright described as “the far and wide left”—i.e., Trotskyism.

Former MI5 agent David Shayler has subsequently revealed that the British state had a high-level informer within the SLL/WRP in a leading party position in the late 1960s and early 1970s, a period of enormous revolutionary potential in Britain and internationally.

Even the recent authorised official history of MI5 by Christopher Andrew, published in 2009 to mark the 100th anniversary of the foundation of what was initially known as the Secret Service Bureau, acknowledges that the WRP was under surveillance by MI5’s “F Branch,” which was responsible for “counter-subversion.”

There is ample evidence that MI5 was heavily involved in the Thatcher government efforts to defeat the miners during the 1984/1985 strike. Among their anti-democratic strikebreaking activities was the infiltration of agent Roger Windsor into the National Union of Mineworkers leadership.

There is no doubt that, under conditions in which social and political antagonisms are reaching the breaking point, the state security apparatus has accelerated its anti-working class and anti-socialist activities. That is the real reason May’s acknowledgement received virtually no comment in the media.

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