

DUNCAN CAMPBELL reveals how easy it is for corrupt cops and detectives to exploit police computers

Police secrets for sale

PERSONAL DETAILS about cars and criminal records can be obtained illegally from the Police National Computer and other computers for between £4 and £15 a check. In an investigation concluded this week, we obtained details about cars and individuals by paying a former policeman who routinely offers the service as part of a private detective business.

In an interview on Tuesday this week, Mr Malcolm James, who runs James Investigation and Security Services of Windsor explained in detail to this writer, and to Mr Julian Jacottet, a member of the Thames Valley Police Authority, how he had done seven car checks and five personal checks in the preceding week. I pretended to be a manager of a video games company, and Mr Jacottet was only introduced as a member of the Police Authority at the close of the interview.

Full details of the offences and the evidence collected by the *New Statesman* was given on Wednesday to Thames Valley Police Assistant Chief Constable John Reddington for investigation. We have established that Mr James, in common with other detective agencies employing ex-policemen, has access to a wide range of contacts among serving police officers who are prepared to sell police-held personal information for money. We have given the Thames Valley Police the names of two officers, one at Burnham near Slough, and the other at Windsor, who we



Private detective Malcolm James (inset and above right) presents his bill (see below) for information extracted from the Police National Computer during Tuesday's confrontation with writer Duncan Campbell (above centre) and Julian Jacottet (above left) of the Thames Valley Police Authority. The bill: To 'check certain numbers' on the police computer' - £4 each.

believe have been supplying Mr James with unauthorised information.

The gravity of the offences of which we have obtained evidence is illustrated by a recent and almost identical case at Nottingham Crown Court. In May this year, a former police inspector and a former director of the Ladbroke gaming and casino concern pleaded guilty to corruptly paying Nottingham police sergeant Brian Crowston to obtain information stored in the Police National Computer. Although both men were heavily fined and received suspended sentences, the police sergeant was later acquitted because of a problem in the prosecution evidence.

In the Nottingham case, Ladbroke's employees had been writing down numbers of cars seen outside rival casinos, and then approaching the owners to win their business. Last week, posing as 'Bill Morton' of the non-existent 'Jomor Sales and Marketing' video games and Space Invaders concern, I outlined a similar situation to Mr James.

We wished to woo the custom of clients whose car numbers had been noted outside the premises of agents for rival games companies. I gave Mr James a list of ten numbers, and he said he had methods - which he later confirmed consisted of paying other serving policemen to check up on the police computer - which would enable him to quickly discover their owners.

In fact the cars concerned belonged to *New Statesman* employees or to colleagues of Mr Jacottet, who is also a Labour County Councillor for Abingdon. The cost of each check was £4, and Mr James passed back the information in batches of three or four numbers because, he explained, it would be 'suspicious' if too many numbers were done at once. All the people concerned had consented to the checks being done.

The checks disclosed the inaccurate and unexpected detail that one car, belonging to *New Statesman* Political Editor Peter Kellner, was on the Stolen and Suspect Vehicle Index of the Police National Computer. But his car is not stolen, has never been stolen, and he is its first and only owner. The presence of this entry means that he would be stopped and be in jeopardy of being detained or arrested if his car was checked by any policeman.

It has not been possible to obtain an account of this error from the police before publication, but published Home Office papers on the Police National Computer reveal that the so-called 'Stolen Vehicle Index' actually includes only a minority of cars which are actually stolen. Others may be used by the police themselves, or are 'suspicious' and to be openly or secretly watched. Mr Kellner has written to Thames Valley Police, asking for an explanation and a correction. (His car number may have been routinely recorded

Jomor Sales Marketing,



London.

19 Alexandra Road, Windsor, Berkshire.

N. 1.

Telephone: Windsor 58883/58511 (24 hr Answerphone 58885)
Telex: 849462 MJ/JISS

Our Ref: MJ/1410/224/JSM/INV

Your Ref:

Invoice/Statement 224

Tax Rate:

Date: 14/10/81.

Tax Point

Re: Investigations.	SALES PRICE	VAT	TOTAL
To Investigate Company concerned. And check certain numbers.	£40.00		£40.00.

select the course they wish to go on, instead of receiving guidance (as at present), and must then face a series of competitive interviews.

Dissidents within the MSC feel that if the chief criteria for selection is to be the applicant's subsequent likely employability then the effect will be to discriminate against women and blacks - whom employers tend to resist taking on. Another likely effect will be to confine women to courses regarded as within the traditional female sphere.

The London Regional Manager of MSC Training Services Division, Mr A. Yates, wrote on 1

September to the MSC head office to complain about the proposed changes:

There is a genuine concern among Skill Centre managers and District Managers that the more elitist approach to training is going to hit hardest the less able individual. It is one thing for the Report to suggest a balanced and comprehensive range of provision, but quite another to act on this.

He felt the change 'would leave only preparatory courses that may lead nowhere' to the 'low-achievers'.

Notes of a discussion at a regional general managers' conference in

July show that there was resistance 'to the strong lead for competitive selection' given by the Deputy Chief Executive of MSC training, Mr Rimington. The Controller of Strategic Planning says:

Competition would discriminate against special groups. The first-come-first-served rule was not fair but it was practical, impersonal and defensible. Competition could not be said to be fairer. TOPS would have serious difficulties in establishing desirable criteria and desirable criteria could only be judged subjectively.

The Scottish Region agreed it

would 'discriminate against certain groups of applicants and would be out of line with the MSC's new training initiative and "Open Tech" scheme.' Both of these are intended to open training opportunities for the unskilled.

The Equal Opportunities Commission, who were not aware of these proposals until the *NS* showed them the documentation, say that if the documents are genuine the MSC appear to be intending to propagate discriminatory practices and may also be in breach of the Sex Discrimination Act. The MSC has no immediate plans to implement the scheme. □

because of a recent family car trip to the Republic of Ireland.)

James could also obtain information from the Criminal Names files of the Police National Computer, and from the special local intelligence 'Collator Project' computer, which is run by Thames Valley Police at their Kidlington headquarters. He offered this service as part of a personal 'Status Check' enquiry service about named individuals. He was given five names, three in London and two in Oxfordshire, and he reported to us information about three from a civil debt register, which may be openly consulted, and reported that two others were 'clean' after checks on local police records in their home areas of Abingdon and North London. In these cases, although he had described in detail the fact that such facilities were available to him as an ex-policeman, there is no certain evidence of information having been illegally obtained.

THREE YEARS ago, the official Data Protection recommended that a new Data Protection Committee Authority be set up which should scrutinise all databases including those used for police intelligence purposes. Safeguards to be provided by the recommended independent Authority would prohibit unauthorised access, and control the type of information gathered and the uses to which it could be put.

The Home Office is understood to have prepared a White Paper for publication later this year, in which the idea of a wholly independent authority is rejected. The only proposed scrutiny of police files and their safeguards (if any) will be by the Home Office itself. This would exempt from outside scrutiny police computers including the Police National Computer at Hendon, north London which holds over 40 million records, including 4 million names and 20 million vehicle records. It would also exempt the controversial Collator Project computer at TVP's Kidlington HQ. This computer, which has been in operation for five years, records and collates general information about individuals in each police station area, even though they may be quite innocent of any criminal involvement, or even be the victims of crime. On occasions in the past, it has been established that inaccurate gossip has been recorded on this computer.

The Thames Valley Police Authority are presently considering the purchase of a new computer. Another one may replace and upgrade the controversial Collator computer, which the police have got either to buy from the Home Office or to scrap. The other may computerise several less controversial aspects of the Force's operations. Another development is that an outside police officer is already investigating a report made this summer by Mr Jacottet and another Labour councillor, that in two specific cases, information had leaked from Thames Valley Police files. On one occasion, an employer discovered from police that an employee had

been arrested, although not prosecuted, for having sex with a woman in a car - and sacked him. On another, a publican was checking out on customers' car numbers using the police computer.

On another occasion, senior police officers challenged Mr Jacottet to provide evidence for another complaint that such abuses and leaks did take place . . . He now says that he is 'absolutely convinced and very alarmed' by the transactions in police information whose conclusion he witnessed. He will now ask the Authority to review urgently the controversial matter of safeguards before agreeing to the purchase or development of any new computers by the Thames Valley Police.

THE READY AND OFFHAND manner in which James offered to and then carried out police computer checks shows how difficult it would be to supervise the ever-growing computer-based police surveillance systems. With hundreds of thousands of checks now being made daily, it has obviously been possible for many unauthorised checks to be made.

During a meeting last week James explained his ambiguous view of the legal niceties of the situation:

Things can be done, numbers can be found out - I know you'd have difficulty (getting the information) . . . If I can get this for you I must stress that nobody must know we got the information for you on this. It's not illegal but being ex-police like a lot of us we do have certain perks in this job. We do look after each other . . .

He then explained that doing a 'status check' would include saying whether or not someone had a criminal record. Asked if he could then find out if people had a 'disreputable past', he explained:

Yes that's quite easy. But I must stress again all that sort of thing is, has got to be, completely discreet and where you got it from is your own business. We don't break the law but at the same time we don't want to advertise where we get our information. We do our best to help our clients.

Did he regard this sort of inquiry as improper?

A lot of people turn round and say it's being inquisitive. We don't agree with that. Things which I can get - like criminal records - are things which, having lots of friends in the police force - you know, they do help me like I help the police.

I commented:

The last thing one wants is for some bastard of a journalist to find out about it.

James: Well quite, yeah

CHECKING OUT individuals was, he said, just as easy. Doing a 'status check', if it had to be quick (as we had requested) would discover from

the police:

. . . if there's anything known about them in that area - that's all we can do on a quick one

He explained later that it would be much better if he had dates of birth (which are required by the Police National Computer to do a reliable 'trace'). He explained his basic method:

All we can do is mention these names to the local police station in the area . . .

In each major Thames Valley Police station, there is a video terminal to the Police National Computer, and also one or more of the 34 specially installed extra terminals for the Collator Project computer. Thames Valley is so far unique in having their whole collection of local intelligence information on a computer, which is the result of a joint experiment with the Home Office, begun five years ago. It holds information on 1 in 7 people in the Thames Valley Police area, and probably 1 in 3 or 4 adult males.

During our interview on Tuesday, Mr James repeated his description of how he got access to police computer records.

We have done seven (car checks) so far. We will have the other three by the end of the week. I tell you, it's all right to get one or two, but it's going to be very awkward to get a whole amount like that, because people are going to get suspicious . . .

Indeed it was awkward. When a check reveals that a car is on the Stolen Vehicle Index (as happened with both Peter Kellner's and a car recently owned by another staff member), the police computer operator must automatically report where the vehicle was seen. As a result, explained James, the policeman making the unauthorised check had to fabricate an answer to report back. In consequence there should not be any difficulty in determining the names of the guilty men.

James has also carried out vehicle investigations for companies such as Ford Motor Credit of Brentwood, Essex. A company official agreed that James had been asked to discover the whereabouts of vehicles sold to defaulting customers, and had then repossessed them or reported back. 'We don't know for sure whether they've done it by the use of government facilities . . . they're paid to do a service for us'. But he would not knowingly seek police computer information, he said.

James then claimed that he could bug houses (and has shown an extensive catalogue of bugs), obtain details of bank accounts and hire purchase arrangements and other private personal information.

Finally we told him our real identities, and warned him that the evidence of apparent corruption offences would be given to the Chief Constable of Thames Valley Police. He said he had nothing to say. □

Jan Kavan reports on Czech state violence

Beating the 'Polish disease'

CZECHOSLOVAKIA's authorities are increasingly turning to extra-legal violence in fear of contamination from 'the Polish disease'.

Last Tuesday at 2am the bell rang in Zina Freundova's Prague flat. She was alone. When she opened the door, three men rushed in, and she was blindfolded. Mrs Freund (pictured) is 30, and is one

of the Charter 77 spokespersons. She and her husband Karel are active in the Committee to Defend the unjustly prosecuted (VONS).

The intruders beat and kicked her, meanwhile covering her mouth and restraining her with painful, clearly professional holds. 'We'll kill you next time', they said. 'If you wish to live, remember that . . . The post-mortem will show suicide by strangulation . . .'

They tore off her nightgown, forced her down, parted her legs, and touched her in simulated rape. The flat was searched, but all that was taken was a recorder with cassettes of an English course.

SUCH INCIDENTS are now widespread, and many victims, like



Zina Freundova

Zina Freundova, now distrust the hospitals. Karel Freund was badly beaten-up a month ago during a 48-hour Secret Service detention

which followed the break-up of a VONS meeting.

Another Charter 77 spokesperson, the 32-year-old folk singer Karel Soukop, had his fingers broken during a four-hour police station torture session - while he was being persuaded to go to 'voluntary' exile in the West. VONS has issued a statement drawing attention to 'a constant rise in violence during interrogation, wanton intrusion into homes, repeated unwarranted detention . . . sequestration of mail and continuous shadowing by plainclothes police'. Officials do not bother to conceal that the terrorism is designed to head off any attempt at widespread agitation on the Solidarity model. □