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PRESS RELEASE - 8 MAY 2005

OPPOSITION CANDIDATE STOPPED AND SEARCHED UNDER TERRORISM ACT

Around 18:00 this evening, on the A59, just outside Harrogate, John Allman, the Alliance For Change candidate for Harrogate and Knaresborough in the British general election of 5 May 2005, and his passengers (who included Janet Cresswell, an Australian citizen well-known to students of non-lethal weapons technology use against civilians), were detained and searched by the roadside, under Section 44 of the Terrorism Act 2000. Mr Allman's car was also searched. There is no obligation for "suspects" to be told why they are being searched, when Section 44 is invoked.

The operation involved both the Ministry of Defence and North Yorkshire police, using three vehicles between them. The officers were aware of *whose* car, person and passengers it was that they proceeded to insist on searching, regardless.

Because the members of party were co-operative, the police operation was able to be completed without the need for formal arrests, or the use of force. Nothing incriminating was found, and the party were allowed to leave the scene of the searches approximately an hour after first being approached by police. The only adverse consequence of the prolonged interruption was Mr Allman missing the evening church service he ordinarily attends on Sundays.

The North Yorkshire police took away documents appertaining to the political opinions of the former candidate and others present. The documents taken included one that contained excerpts from correspondence of the Home Office's Covert Investigation Policy Team within the Intelligence and Security Liaison Unit. This document and the Home Office correspondence were concerned with European Parliament Resolution A4-0005/99, which calls for a ban on "manipulation" weapons, an election issue raised during Mr Allman's recent campaign. The officers also took photographs of members of the party.

The officers were relaxed and polite, and even laughed at jokes they were told. However, for some unexplained reason, it was indicated (in writing) to members of the party, after the searches had been completed, that the "officers reasonably believed that disclosure of their names would put them in danger".

Section 44 searches are supposed to be authorised by the Home Secretary. Humourously, these particular searches happened to be carried out at a time when the United Kingdom technically did not *have* a Home Secretary, due to indecisiveness on the part of the Prime Minister in the aftermath of the election.

From 11 September 2001 until 31 December 2004, 702 people were *arrested* under the Terrorism Act. Of these, 17 were convicted of offences under the Terrorism Act - approximately 2.42% of those arrested, about one in forty. This dismal "hit rate" (or high level of inconvenience occasioned to people who turned out to be innocent), does not take account of those inconvenienced *without* officially being "arrested".

[Source: http://www.homeoffice.gov.uk/docs3/tatc_arrest_stats.html]