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Whistleblower Peter Francis said he'd be smeared. He was right

Paul Lewis



The former undercover cop is being punished for revealing that the Lawrence family was spied on

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When we first asked the police whistleblower [Peter Francis](#) if he would speak publicly about his infiltration of anti-racist groups, he hesitated. "You know they'll come after me," he said. "They will do everything they can to discredit me." Francis, who contributed to our book about undercover operations, knows a thing or two about the dark side of policing. He was deployed as spy in a top-secret special branch unit called the [Special Demonstration Squad](#) (SDS).

Thanks in large part to his courage, the public now knows a great deal about the SDS, and its [use of dead children's identities](#) and sexual relationships with women in a four-decade spy programme directed at political activists.

This was not a secret Scotland Yard wanted out. Neither did the force want the public to know the details of his deployment in anti-racist groups, when he spied on those campaigning for justice over the death of Stephen Lawrence. Having previously been quoted as "Pete Black" or "Officer A", Francis knew that, if he spoke on the record using his real identity, he would be taken more seriously.

On the other hand, he was aware that what he had to say would make him enemies. Former managers had already given him stern warnings about speaking out. Last month, he came out of the shadows in articles in the Guardian and a Channel 4 Dispatches documentary. He has been surprised only at how long it has taken for the whispering against his character to begin. On Friday the Daily Mail published a [story suggesting Francis was an unreliable witness](#). The reasons? First, because he suffered a mental breakdown in 2001. And second, because he apparently did not mention the full details of his deployment when he was interviewed by another journalist four years ago.

That Francis suffered from the pressures of his four-year deployment is not news. He has been transparent about the psychological difficulties he experienced living a double life. Neither has there been any attempt to hide the fact that he was previously interviewed by Tony Thompson, who wrote an articles about Francis, calling him "Officer A", in the Observer in 2010. In our book, we thanked Thompson for introducing us to Francis.

The Mail says that in 22 hours of interviews with Thompson, Francis never mentioned that his supervisors had asked him to find information that could be used to smear the Lawrence family. If that is true, I am not at all surprised. Thompson interviewed Francis for a book pitch that was never written. My colleague Rob Evans and I have spent more than two years working with Francis. The revelations did not all tumble out at the start. We checked out what he was telling, found new sources, dug deeper, published stories. Over time he started to trust us more, and opened up. That is often how sources behave. We have not counted how many hours we spent interviewing Francis. It could easily exceed 100. Throughout, we have found him to be a thoroughly trustworthy individual

with nothing to hide. He has received no payment for his help - any insinuation that his testimony was concocted to promote our book is absurd.

The former police officers who have cast doubt on the account given by Francis either had nothing to do with his deployment, or have much to lose if his controversy results in a public inquiry. Francis should be judged by his record. His revelations about the use of sexual relations against activists have been proved true. So too were his revelations about the use of dead children's identities. Now, rightly, all eyes are on what he has said about the Lawrence campaigns. So far Scotland Yard has not disputed that Francis was deployed in groups campaigning over Lawrence's death, that special branch was monitoring the political persuasion of people visiting the family home, or that there were attempts to discredit the murdered teenager's friend, Duwayne Brooks. Neither has Scotland Yard disputed what Francis said about the Macpherson inquiry, namely that he wanted the public inquiry to know the details of his deployment, but senior officers refused to come clean.

Interestingly, however, they have admitted that Francis was not the only undercover officer spying on groups campaigning over Lawrence's death. For his part, Francis is declining to co-operate in the Met's internal inquiry into the scandal. He has said he will testify under oath before an independent public inquiry. That is the best route to the truth.

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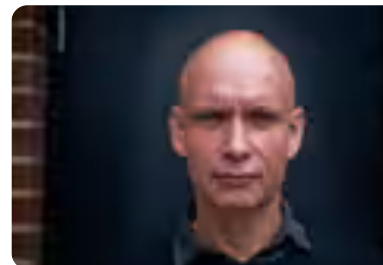
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