

# Britain: Spying network exposed targeting organisations critical of police

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The massive extent of a British police spying network, systematically monitoring political protesters, activists and organisations critical of the police, has been revealed this week.

On June 24 the *Guardian* reported that London's Metropolitan Police set up an operation to spy on the family of murdered teenager Stephen Lawrence following his murder by racists in April 1993. This was revealed by Peter Francis, a former undercover police officer turned whistleblower, who said his commanding officers asked him to find "dirt" that could be used against the family.

Francis was recruited into a secret Special Branch department called the Special Demonstration Squad (SDS), which operated in the UK from 1968 until 2008, spying on protest and activist groups, mainly based in London.

The *Guardian* also revealed that another SDS recruit, Mark Jenner, who used the identity "Mark Cassidy" in the 1990s, infiltrated the Colin Roach Centre named after Colin Roach, a 21-year-old black man who died in police custody in 1983. Such was the extent of Jenner's infiltration "he had a five-year relationship with a woman he was spying on before his deployment ended in 2000", according to the *Guardian*.

Another organisation spied on was the Newham Monitoring Project, another group that specifically investigated allegations of police harassment, brutality and corruption. The *Guardian* reports, "The second spy, whose identity is not known, did not infiltrate the Newham Monitoring Project directly, but got inside associated groups and was able to monitor its activities."

Francis's activities were first revealed in an article April 2010 by the *Observer*, but at the time he was only referred to as Officer A. It outlined how he had been

able to infiltrate the then youth organisation of the Militant Group (now the Socialist Party), Youth Against Racism in Europe (YRE).

Francis also infiltrated the Brian Douglas justice campaign. Douglas was a fit, strong 33-year-old boxing instructor who died after he was smashed over the head with a police baton in 1995, after being stopped in his car regarding his driving.

Francis told the *Guardian*, "By me passing on all the campaign information—everything that the family was planning and organising through Youth Against Racism in Europe—I felt I was virtually reducing their chances of ever receiving any form of justice to zero. To this day, I personally feel that family has never had the justice they deserved."

After joining the SDS in 1993, Francis was set up in an undercover flat in north London and adopted a new identity—Pete Black—until mid-1996. Initially the plan was for him to infiltrate anarchist groups, but just prior to his deployment he was instructed to target anti-racist groups in London instead.

Francis told the Channel 4 *Dispatches* current affairs programme that the change of target "can be summarised in two words, and that's Stephen Lawrence."

From the beginning the police sabotaged any serious investigation into Lawrence's death and the Crown Prosecution Service vetoed a trial, citing lack of evidence. A private prosecution by the family in 1996 similarly failed.

Public anger quickly mounted at the failure of the police to properly conduct a murder investigation and there was widespread support for the Lawrence family's attempt to get justice for their son.

Under these conditions Francis was asked to monitor the campaign for justice for Stephen Lawrence and

joined Youth Against Racism in Europe, rising to become a YRE branch secretary. His remit was to attend demonstrations, attend meetings and gather information on individuals supporting the Stephen Lawrence campaign. He was asked by his supervisors to find information to pass to the media that could be used to tar the campaign, its supporters and even the Lawrence family. Francis explained, “They wanted anything that could smear the campaign... [if] someone in the family were political activists, involved in demonstrations, drug dealers.”

Francis explained neither he nor any other SDS officer were able to find anything of note, except “rumours and conjecture” about the family not being a loving, caring home. Even this spurious information was dutifully passed on, Francis explained, stating, “This could have been used if they were really desperate to smear the family.”

In a public relations exercise designed to conjure up an image of a caring police force a liaison officer was assigned to the Lawrence family. However, Francis has revealed the officer was asked to gather details of anyone who visited the home. The information was then passed to Special Branch and SDS operatives who assessed whether they were “politicos”.

Francis took journalist Paul Lewis to a former SDS safe house where SDS officers would meet up following a particular campaign. He explained on one occasion the then Metropolitan Commissioner Paul Condon came to one such gathering and presented the SDS officers with a bottle of whiskey to thank them for their work.

Failing in their attempt to smear the Lawrence family, the SDS targeted Stephen’s friend Duwayne Brooks, who had been with him the night Stephen was killed but managed to escape.

Francis explained how after he had picked up intelligence on Brooks’ presence at a demonstration outside the fascist British National Party HQ. A trawl was made of film footage and on this basis Brooks was accused of partaking in “perceived criminality.”

Francis said his superiors were very pleased with this development and saw it as a way to discredit the “whiter than white” Stephen Lawrence campaign.

Brooks was charged with criminal damage and violent disorder, but when brought to court the case was dismissed as an abuse of process.

Despite all the abuse and slander heaped on them, the Lawrence family persisted in their fight for justice, forcing the Labour government, elected in 1997, to launch a public inquiry headed by Sir William McPherson. Reporting in 1999, McPherson accused the police of “institutional racism”. Francis explained that the role of the SDS campaign to smear the Lawrence family was deliberately withheld from the inquiry and stated that there were even more secrets to come out about police spying operations.

The SDS was replaced in 2008 by a new spying operation, the National Domestic Extremism Unit. Following a Freedom of Information request, it was revealed this week by the *Guardian* that the National Domestic Extremism Unit operates a secret database that has the names of 8,931 individuals, who have “have their own record”.

The *Guardian* notes that the unit uses “surveillance techniques, including undercover police, paid informants and intercepts, against political campaigners from across the spectrum.” It further states, “The extremism unit monitors the full range of activists: from far-right activists in the English Defence League through to animal rights protesters, anti-capitalists and anti-war demonstrators.”

These revelations, following those of former US National Security Agency employee Edward Snowden, who exposed the role of the UK intelligence body GCHQ in gathering almost unfathomable amounts of digital information on the UK’s population, reveals the presence of an extraordinarily widespread police state apparatus.

The ruling elite are acutely aware of the enormous developing social explosion that is being stoked by their austerity measures. For all the hand wringing and feigned shock by figures in the political establishment regarding these exposures, it is clear that the surveillance and penetration of any perceived opposition is developing apace.



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