

UK police demand Channel 4 hand over whistle-blower's footage

Robert Stevens
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British police have stepped up their efforts to seize material from the Channel 4 TV station relating to their broadcasting of revelations provided by former UK intelligence operative and whistle-blower Peter Francis.

In recent years Francis has provided material to Channel 4 and the *Guardian* newspaper revealing that Britain's intelligence services and police have organised systematic and long-term spying and infiltration of political groups and protest campaigns.

Francis was recruited into a secret Special Branch department called the Special Demonstration Squad (SDS) in 1993. The SDS operated in the UK from 1968 until 2008, spying on protest and activist groups, mainly based in London.

Francis' activities were first revealed in an article April 2010 by the *Guardian*'s sister paper, the *Observer*. At the time he was only referred to as Officer A. The *Observer* reported how he had been able to infiltrate the youth organisation of the Militant Group (now the Socialist Party), Youth Against Racism in Europe (YRE).

After joining the SDS, Francis was set up in a 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 instead.

Francis told the Channel 4 *Dispatches* programme last year that the change of target he was to monitor “can be summarised in two words, and that's Stephen Lawrence.”

Last June, the *Guardian* reported that London's Metropolitan Police set up an operation to spy on the family of teenager Stephen Lawrence following his murder by racists in April 1993. Francis said his commanding officers asked him to find “dirt” that

could be used against the family.

In the face of this dirty operation, 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 in smearing the Lawrence family was withheld from the inquiry and stated that there were even more secrets to come out about police spying operations.

This week it was revealed by the *Guardian* that Mick Creedon, the chief constable of Derbyshire who is leading the Operation Herne investigation into the SDS, has demanded that Channel 4 provide documents and unseen footage regarding the Francis disclosures. Operation Herne (formerly Soisson) was formed in October 2011 to look into alleged misconduct and criminality engaged in by members of the SDS. Its web site notes, “Similar matters had been previously aired as early as 2002 in a BBC documentary.”

According to the newspaper, lawyers for Creedon are demanding Channel 4 surrender “all written and electronic correspondence with Mr Francis together with any notes and all unedited video footage.”

This follows a letter sent by the police's lawyers to Channel 4 last October making the same demand. The letter read in part, “In the *Dispatches* episode *The Police's Dirty Secret*, an individual by the name of Peter Francis is believed to have provided a large amount of information to the production team.

“It is of concern to the senior investigating officer, Chief Constable Mick Creedon, that Mr Francis may have revealed the names of fellow operatives, both past and present. In many cases, just the revelation of their true/pseudonym identities could put their lives and well-

being of their families at risk.

“Similarly, in the broadcast, Peter Francis revealed a meeting location for SDS colleagues. It is of grave concern that he may have revealed further covert police premises and methodology practised during his deployment with the unit.”

The police are attempting to justify anti-democratic measures, including demanding that the media hand over source material, on the basis of investigating whether a breach of the Official Secrets Act and other offences has occurred. Creedon’s lawyers have cited Francis’ disclosures about “the acceptance of sexual relationships between officers and activists as well as the smearing of high-profile campaigns.”

The *Guardian* said that Channel 4 intends to resist the demand by Creedon’s lawyers.

Francis said in response to the move, “The threat of prosecution is designed not only to keep me quiet, but also all the other hundred or so former undercover officers from ever speaking out. It saddens me but does not surprise me that the police don’t like their dirty undercover secret being revealed to the public. They should investigate the allegations properly.”

Following the revelations he made last year, Francis offered to assist Operation Herne if the police withdrew their threat to investigate him over the Official Secrets Act. The police refused.

Francis has been granted limited immunity to testify at an official inquiry, set up by Home Secretary Theresa May, to examine the undercover infiltration of the Stephen Lawrence campaign and other allegations.

The move against Francis, via Operation Hearne, is part of concerted campaign by the government to silence anyone disclosing the secrets of the vast state surveillance system that has been established.

Since last June, when the *Guardian* first published revelations by Edward Snowden, the former US National Security Agency whistle-blower, the government has responded with actions more commonly associated with military dictatorships.

Last July, in an operation personally approved by Prime Minister David Cameron, officers from Britain’s Government Communications Headquarters (GCHQ) oversaw the destruction of computers containing documents from Snowden in the *Guardian*’s London office. Calls for prosecutions were made from the political and intelligence establishment alleging that the

Guardian was endangering national security and assisting terrorists with its reporting of the Snowden documents.

In August, this unprecedented campaign of intimidation and threats was stepped up with the detention at Heathrow Airport of David Miranda, the partner of Snowden collaborator and then- *Guardian* journalist Glenn Greenwald. Officials threatened Miranda with jail and seized his laptop, camera, cell phone and other personal items. This was the first time journalistic materials had been seized under the pretext of the UK’s Terrorism Act. Miranda was described as being involved in terrorist activity in papers prepared by the police, in league with the UK government and its intelligence agencies.

The prime minister has demanded a parliamentary inquiry into the newspaper—a call supported by Deputy Prime Minister and Liberal Democrat leader Nick Clegg. This was endorsed by the opposition Labour Party’s Keith Vaz who agreed that the Home Affairs Committee, which he chairs, would undertake such an investigation. Parliament’s Intelligence and Security Committee is also investigating the *Guardian*’s disclosures, reinforcing claims that the newspaper’s reports threatened national security.

The UK media has been complicit overall in the unprecedented moves to silence the *Guardian*, with the most right-wing sections supporting the government’s clampdown. The anti-democratic moves against Channel 4, and by association the *Guardian*, have met no opposition by the media. The *Guardian* and the right-wing *Daily Telegraph* reported the story, with the nominally liberal *Independent* giving over just five paragraphs to its report. The BBC did not report it at all.



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