

Whistleblower from UK covert police unit reveals spying on workers

Harvey Thompson

25 March 2015

Last week, Labour Party MP John McDonnell read out a statement in parliament from a former member of an undercover Scotland Yard police unit turned whistleblower, Peter Francis.

Francis was part of the covert Metropolitan police unit, the Special Demonstration Squad (SDS), that monitored hundreds of political groups between 1968 and 2008. The SDS was replaced in 2008 by a new spying operation, the National Domestic Extremism Unit.

Francis spent four years undercover infiltrating organisations of political activists, and has named five trade unions whose members he gathered intelligence on.

In the 1990s, Francis also infiltrated the anti-racist movement and the Militant Tendency (predecessor of the Socialist Party).

In the parliamentary statement, Francis apologised "unreservedly to all the union members I personally spied on and reported back on whilst deployed undercover."

He stated that union members he had spied on included "those not only engaged in working in the construction industry but also those in the National Union of Students (NUS), National Union of Teachers (NUT), Communication Workers Union (CWU), UNISON and the Fire Brigades Union (FBU)."

Part of Francis's statement read:

"I am humbled as well as honoured to be offered to speak tonight at such an important book launch here at the prestigious House of Commons.

"However I cannot appear here for a number of reasons, including and primarily, because of some very serious outstanding legal issues/difficulties with the Metropolitan police, that continue to hang over me ever since I became a whistleblower and therefore a

potential criminal in their eyes.

"I have received clear legal advice that me, even speaking here today, is likely to be considered a breach of the Official Secrets Act because I have not been granted permission from the Metropolitan police or Home Secretary to speak to you.

"This remarkable, well-researched and must-read book clearly shows how police spying on political activists has destroyed lives and that I, most unfortunately and regrettably, played a part in this.

"The forthcoming Home Secretary's public inquiry into undercover policing must include a forensic, independent (in other words, non-police) examination into all the blacklisting files compiled by the Consulting Association and then cross-reference them with corresponding Special Branch individual activists' records to look at the areas of collusion."

Francis is expected to give evidence to a public inquiry into undercover policing convened by Home Secretary Theresa May, and has offered to give evidence in any court case the unions and blacklisted workers may bring.

Francis said that the public inquiry headed by Lord Justice Pitchford should examine the blacklisting files alongside the police's records of campaigners to "look at the areas of collusion". The remit of the inquiry will be announced in July, following consultation with those who were subjected to the surveillance and others.

This month, the *Daily Mirror* revealed that one of the undercover officers in the SDS, Mark Jenner, posed as a joiner and was a member of the Union of Construction, Allied Trades and Technicians for three years.

The previously uncovered role of the SDS is detailed on the *World Socialist Web Site* here, here and here.

Further detailed information specifically on Jenner's

role is has been made available by the Spinwatch research organisation here.

Countering police denials, in his statement Francis said, “Let me state very clearly that Mark Jenner was 100 percent one of my fellow undercover SDS police officers deployed alongside me in the 1990s.”

He added that Jenner must be called to the public inquiry “to account for his spying on, amongst numerous other political protesters, the totally law-abiding construction union UCATT members whose only ‘crimes’ were being union members.”

Francis’s statement to parliament was timed to coincide with the book launch of *Blacklisted: The Secret War between Big Business and Union Activists*, by Dave Smith and Phil Chamberlain, which details the blacklisting of thousands of workers by multinational construction companies. Smith is a blacklisted engineer, who discovered that the construction blacklisting organisation, the Consulting Association, had a 36-page file on him. In a 2013 interview, he said, “After I lost my job [in 1998] at Schal, I couldn’t get a job anywhere and this was in the middle of a building boom.”

As a result, his annual income fell from £36,000 to £12,000, making it difficult for him to support his young family.

The book describes evidence of how police covertly shared information about workers with the blacklisters. Francis says that he personally collected some of the intelligence that was stored on the blacklisting files.

Smith is also calling for an investigation into the collusion of trade union officials in the blacklisting of workers, some of whose names he reportedly saw in blacklisting files. In his interview, Smith said, “We expect the unions to take disciplinary action against these individuals. We know who they are and we have their names.”

Smith is also opposed to the building industry’s practise of union convenors being appointed and paid for by major contractors. He states in the interview, “I’m not saying every appointed convenor is corrupt. But this system calls into question whether a trade union is independent.”

When these latest revelations are added to the revelations by former US National Security Agency employee Edward Snowden, they reveal an extraordinarily widespread police state apparatus

assembled to crush the inevitable growth of social opposition.



To contact the WSWS and the Socialist Equality Party visit:

wsws.org/contact