

UK: Second undercover police officer exposed infiltrating Socialist Party

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A joint investigation by BBC *Newsnight* and the *Guardian* has uncovered a second undercover police officer, known as “Carlo Neri” who infiltrated the Socialist Party of England and Wales between 2001 and 2006.

The first such undercover operative was Peter Francis, who infiltrated Militant Labour and one of its offshoots, Youth against Racism in Europe (YRE). Francis became branch secretary of the Hackney Militant Labour branch during the early 1990s.

The latest exposure relates to the activities of the Special Demonstration Squad (SDS), who had carried out criminal activity including having extended sexual relationships with at least eight female activists who in some instances had children by the undercover officers involved. The Metropolitan Police were forced to pay millions in compensation and the government established the Pitchford Inquiry into undercover policing.

In *Newsnight's* January 18 broadcast, an anonymous woman is interviewed with whom Neri shared an apartment with for 18 months. She is now suing the Metropolitan Police, accusing them of “abusive, cold-hearted, psychological torture”. She also reveals that Neri claimed to be a locksmith and as such was trusted with keys by those taken in by him.

The response to the revelations by the Socialist Party has been characterized by light-minded indifference.

The SP issued a press statement on Neri that it is mainly composed of pat phrases from two of its members.

Lois Austin is the previous chair of YRE and a core participant for the SP in the Pitchford Inquiry. She writes blithely, “There was no purpose to infiltrating YRE or Militant Labour. Far from being secretive we publicly advertised our events—the police could have

read our leaflets and newspapers, or attended our public meetings, to find out what was going on.”

The purpose of infiltrating the SP was to obtain information on its internal functioning, to collect names, addresses, personal information, not only of its members but all those that it came into contact with and to disrupt its activities and carry out provocations. The SDS would pass this information to MI5 and Special Branch.

Austin’s assurances of the open, democratic and lawful character of the SP only covers for the unlawful, anti-democratic and illegal offensive waged by the police on behalf of their capitalist paymasters.

This is made plain by the statement citing leading SP member Dave Nellist, a former Labour MP, who calls for the police to be made “democratically accountable.”

As Friedrich Engels, the co-founder of scientific socialism established, far from being a neutral arbiter that can be made to operate above class interests, the police are part of the state’s “special bodies of armed men” assigned the task of keeping the capitalist class in power and the working class oppressed.

They can no more be reformed or made democratically accountable than capitalism itself. Rather the fight for genuine democracy and social equality requires the political overthrow of the state apparatus and its replacement with a workers government.

Nellist closes by making a series of demands on the Pitchford Inquiry and for “the labour and trade union movement” to set up an inquiry “alongside Pitchford.”

Near the end of the statement, he says rhetorically, “We demand to know what today’s ‘Carlo Neris’ are doing.”

This begs the question, what does the SP intend to do

about the revelations of state infiltration of its branches? Why has the SP refused, since the exposure of Francis in 2013, to carry out even the most cursory investigation of how he and now Neri penetrated the SP, who they spied upon and who might they have collaborated with. Based on Neri's claims to be a locksmith, for example, on how many occasions was he given access to the homes of SP members or its own premises?

The response of the SP to Neri comes two year after it took a similar stance regarding Francis. On June 26, 2013, an editorial asserted that "Nothing was gained by the state from infiltrating YRE or the Militant [forerunner of the SP], other than, it seems, opening Peter Francis's eyes to the reality of police brutality, and particularly deaths in police custody, which he says appalled him."

"Nor was it possible," it continued, "for police infiltrators to derail the movement against racism"—even though "Peter Francis did, at least in part, attempt to do so, acting to some degree as an 'agent provocateur', encouraging YRE activists to take part in individual vigilante actions" against the British National Party.

The editorial then turned to a general statement on the function of the police, asking, "In whose interests do the police and other forces of the state act?"

It claims, "In reality the police play a dual role. When workers suffer crime they turn to the police. As Neville Lawrence put it, while not completely trusting the police because of racism his family had no choice but to rely on them to investigate their son's murder, no other possibility existed."

"However, the police are also part of a state machine, which has the role, ultimately, of maintaining and defending the dominant interests of the capitalists."

Ignoring the fact that the police investigation of Stephen's murderers became an occasion to disrupt and discredit his family's support campaign, the editorial continues regarding the supposed "dual rule" of the police that attempts by the Conservative government to impose "austerity on police as on other public sector workers" makes them potential allies of the working class:

"It is very significant that a majority of the Police Federation voted for the right to strike. Socialists should encourage these nascent class splits in the police

force, which will strengthen the hand of the workers' movement in the battles to come."

The SP then argues for "a programme for democratic control of the police" to make them "accountable to local committees," and for "The right of the police to an independent, democratic trade union organisation with the right to strike."

Flying in the face of all they have just written, the SP then declares, "This does not mean that it is possible to gradually democratise the state, so that it becomes a genuinely neutral tool of society as a whole."

This is a case of swallowing camels and straining at gnats, especially given that the possibility of "encouraging nascent class splits" in the police includes winning over agents that have been tasked with infiltrating and disrupting your organisation. Indeed Hanna Sell wrote on September 4 that the observations of "Peter Francis (known to us as Pete Daley), one of the ten-strong SDS squad..." were primarily of note because they "indirectly confirm the correct approach YRE took on a number of issues."

"Clearly, the brutality of the police against anti-racist activists shocked Francis," who they quote without criticism as stating, "I became genuinely anti-police."

She goes on to state that this "genuinely anti-police" police spy "did do serious damage to anti-racist activists" and that "Francis estimates that Special Branch already had around 100 files on members of Militant Labour and YRE, and that he opened another 25." This resulted in one member, Frank Smith, a construction worker, being blacklisted.

The Socialist Party cite Marxist sources on the state only in order to provide a sweetener for the poisonous reformist nostrums they peddle to the working class. In doing so they endanger not only their own members, but anyone who associates with them or looks to them for political leadership.



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