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Don't take Mark Kennedy's story at face value

Paul Lewis



Activists tricked by the police spy don't want his blood – but he has, in their view, tailored the truth to suit his narrative

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Undercover police officer Mark Kennedy 'is proving unwilling to let go of his dual identities'

If reports are true that undercover police officer [Mark Kennedy](#) is planning to sell the book rights to his story, it will be the latest in a well-established genre in tales of espionage sponsored by the British state. [Kennedy's split loyalties](#), complicated romances and infatuation with his adopted identity suggest a resemblance with [Eddie Chapman](#), the infamous British second world war spy known as "Agent Zigzag" due to the apparent ease with which he switched sides. In his book on the extraordinary life of double agent Chapman - or Fritz Graumann, as he was known to his German spymasters - Ben Macintyre explains how both sides were never quite sure whose interests the spy was serving.

The same can be said of Kennedy. [Since we broke the story](#) detailing Kennedy's seven years undercover last week, I've spoken to police, lawyers and activists, all of whom dispute whether Kennedy has gone rogue, native or simply absent without leave. Yesterday we discovered that Kennedy doesn't really know either, but hints that there are grains of truth in all three theories. The [story he sold to the Mail on Sunday](#) contained two very useful facts - if that's what they turn out to be - and a great deal of lurid storytelling, at least some of which may transpire to be fiction.

First, the "facts". Until yesterday we did not know that police chiefs dispatched 15 undercover spies to live as activists in the protest movement over the past decade, and that four of them are still believed to be there today. From what we know, they spend on average about four years undercover, costing the taxpayer £250,000 a year. That would indicate a private company - Acpo - has spent £15m of taxpayers' money to place spies deep undercover to monitor a peaceful protest movement.

The suggestion that some of them are still there, living double lives among activists, is a compelling thought. Since exposing Kennedy's double life, the Guardian has identified two more undercover police officers - we're calling them **Officer A** and **Officer B** - but both vanished before 2009. It will be fascinating to see whether those four officers still living among protesters will retain their cover. Only a bold spy would withstand the onslaught of cross-examinations, background checks and suspicious looks that will inevitably be directed at activists with conspicuous lives.

Kennedy's second major contribution was disclosing that secret tape recordings he made that would have exonerated six environmental activists were withheld by police. At worst, Kennedy is describing an attempt by his superiors to pervert the course of justice in a bid to put innocent campaigners against climate change in jail. The ramifications of that disclosure are profound, and could see the scandal propelled from one investigated by the police watchdog to a matter of serious public concern subject to a full-scale judicial inquiry.

If that was Kennedy's parting shot, his former friends from the green movement could be forgiven for thinking he really had switched sides, completing his transformation into the long-haired activist known as Mark Stone. But Kennedy is proving unwilling to let go of either of his dual identities. "I don't think the police are the good guys and the activists are bad or vice versa," he said. "Both sides did good things and bad things."

Exactly what "bad" was done by his friends in the environmental movement is not made clear, although Kennedy makes some disparaging remarks about a life lived in squats among the "freegans". The one serious criticism Kennedy makes of his activist friends does should be queried. The former spy claims to be in fear for his life, and says that he has barricaded himself into a room in his house in the United States for his protection.

He does not say whether he is most scared of being tracked down by his "former bosses", who he says are in America looking for him, or activists, who are "out to get me". But he suggests repeatedly that scorned friends could reap fatal revenge. Quite aside from the fantasy that an undercover police officer's would-be assassins should be green activists committed to non-violent protest, my personal experience of the individuals he claims to fear suggests the opposite.

Over the last few months my colleague Rob Evans and I have worked extensively with activist friends of Kennedy. Throughout that process, they have been careful not to disclose details of the undercover officer's private life. In particular, they have been at pains to protect his wife and family, who they argued should not be punished for his actions.

Kennedy has shown no such compunction, selling a tabloid personal details about his wife and children in Ireland, including the name of his 12-year-old son and information about their tearful telephone conversations after he

was exposed. The truth is that even after a seven-year betrayal, activists have mixed feelings about "Flash".

Yes, there are those, particularly, I'm told, in Germany, who do not wish Kennedy well. But for many the anger is directed against the state's infiltration of their movement, rather than an old friend they see as damaged and cut loose by his former employer. Some of Kennedy's former friends have even told me they miss him. Hence their upset at what they see as a double betrayal: first, the lies he told in order to maintain his cover as a fellow activist - now, the way in which he has, in their view, tailored the truth to suit his narrative.

They point, for example, to his claim to have had only two sexual relationships while undercover. Those people who knew him best paint a very different picture, of a spy who was sleeping with many women, many times, across Europe. Similarly, Kennedy flatly denies one of the most serious accusations levelled against him: that he revealed that Officer A was, like him, a police spy. But it was the information Kennedy's friends say that he divulged about Officer A that enabled us to identify her as an undercover police officer who had been living in Leeds.

Like all good spy tales, the unfolding story of PC [Mark Kennedy](#) is full of intrigue. But not every twist in the plot should be taken at face value, least of all when told by the protagonist, a confused and isolated police spy who has always struggled to tell the truth.

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