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Peter Francis: undermining family's campaign for justice was my low point

Ex-officer who claims to have spied on Stephen Lawrence family describes regret over infiltrating Brian Douglas campaign



📍 Peter Francis said he felt he was reducing the chances of justice for the family of Brian Douglas, who was hit with a police baton. Photograph: Graham Turner for the Guardian

Paul Lewis and Rob Evans

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Peter Francis, the former police officer who claims to have spied on the Stephen Lawrence campaign, has said his lowest point was undermining the campaign of another family who wanted justice over the death of a boxing instructor who was struck on the head by a police baton.

Francis, who is calling for a public inquiry into covert policing, said he infiltrated the family-led campaign for justice over the death of Brian Douglas, a 33-year-old who was hit over the head with a police baton in 1995 when he was stopped for driving erratically.

In a [webchat with Guardian readers](#), Francis said: "The lowest point I reached morally was when I was standing outside Kennington police station

for the Brian Douglas justice campaign in May 1995. It was a candlelit vigil and his relatives were all there.

"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."

Francis said the same applied to the family of Wayne Douglas, 25, who died in police custody in 1995, another campaign Francis infiltrated. The former police spy's full story is contained in [Undercover: The True Story of Britain's Secret Police](#), which is published this week. The cases of several other police spies are contained in the book.

Francis worked for the Special Demonstration Squad (SDS), one of two secretive [Metropolitan police](#) units that have deployed undercover officers in political groups.

Francis told the Guardian webchat his operation was justified by superiors as necessary to combat "subversives", a term that was loosely defined and included "people who are now mainstream politicians".

"To name one: Jack Straw," he said of the former home secretary. "I read Mr Straw's rather large file. I would suggest he asks to see a copy. It will be a pink file with his individual 'RF' (Registry File) number. The same for [MPs] Diane Abbott and Jeremy Corbyn - and Imran Khan, the lawyer for the Stephen Lawrence family. The human rights solicitor firm Bindmans also had its own dedicated file."

Francis added: "My very clear position now is that police should no longer be involved in any undercover work against political activists."

Francis answered challenging questions by Guardian readers. Asked why he had not spoken out sooner, he said: "I didn't want to go to prison. I have been personally threatened on several occasions that if I ever talked about my work in special branch - and especially the Special Demonstration Squad - I would be prosecuted under the Official Secrets Act.

"The reason I have come forward now is, partially, because I cannot imagine in the present context the director of public prosecutions bringing a case against a whistleblower revealing important information that is in the public interest."

Francis said the "one reservation" he had about revealing how he was asked to spy on and try to smear the Lawrence campaign was that it could overshadow the campaign brought by women who were duped into long-term relationships with undercover officers working for the SDS and its sister squad, the National Public Order Intelligence Unit.

The former police spy has offered to give evidence on behalf of women bringing a lawsuit against the Met police for the psychological damage

caused by relationships they had with undercover police. Francis said he had two sexual encounters with women, which he said were "one night-stands".

"I can rest slightly easier at night than several other SDS officers, because I never promised women I ever loved them or cared about them," he said. "I never said I wanted to spend the rest of my life with them or wanted to father children with them."

Asked why he should be trusted, Francis replied: "Good question. Until yesterday, no one in my life - family, friends, people I work with - knew anything about my undercover life. Coming out in this way has not been easy. But I am doing it because I feel that by coming out of the shadows, and speaking publicly, gives the best chance to try to get a public inquiry."

Francis said he did not have faith in the two already existing inquiries that Theresa May, the home secretary, said would handle his allegations. Stephen Lawrence's father, Neville, also said he had "no confidence" in May's proposals.

"I will not co-operate at all with the two inquiries the home secretary said can deal with these matters," he said. "Only a judicial-led or public inquiry - not just into the Stephen Lawrence allegations, but into the wider controversy - has any chance of ever establishing the truth. If there is a public inquiry, I will happily give all my evidence under oath, explaining what I personally know about the SDS and covert policing of protest groups."

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