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# Stephen Lawrence: live Q&A with police 'smear' campaign whistleblower

Peter Francis, **the former undercover officer** took part in a webchat to answer readers' questions on his undercover work, including targeting Stephen Lawrence's friends and family, as revealed in the new book **Undercover: The True Story of Britain's Secret Police**

Tue 25 Jun 2013 11.58 BST



Police whistleblower Peter Francis, who has revealed disturbing details about his undercover deployment  
Photograph: Graham Turner Photograph: Graham Turner

## Live feed



25 Jun 2013 14.22 BST

### The Q&A has come to an end

Sorry there was not more time to answer all your questions. I hope some of my answers have helped shed a bit more clarity on some of the issues.



**Peter Francis**

25 June 2013 2:21pm

Thanks to everyone for the questions posted.

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25 Jun 2013 14.20 BST

### Question:

why would we trust anything you have to say?



**roundincircles**

25 June 2013 1:23pm

### Peter Francis replies:

■ ■ 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 of to try to get a public inquiry.

*I know that what I have revealed about my spying on the Stephen Lawrence campaign has shocked many people - I believe it needed to be known, although I feel bad about the hurt this will be causing them.*

*But I want to stress that they are not the only people who have been targeted. This issue is wider than that - which is why the home secretary I think was wrong to ask an existing inquiry into alleged 'corruption' in the Lawrence inquiry deal with this (as well as the Met's inquiry, Operation Herne).*

*There are also other victims: the parents of dead children whose identities were used by SDS and NPOIU officers, who were too upset to appear on last night's Dispatches programme. Also the women. I dread to think how many other women still don't know the men they were with were in fact undercover police. There could also be more children out there, who are oblivious their father was an undercover cop.*

*My full story - and that of other officers - **is in the book that is published today by Rob Evans and Paul Lewis**. I have received no payment for this, but I have cooperated with their long-running investigation.*

*I will not cooperate at all with the two inquiries the home secretary said can deal with these matters, even if they are 'supervised' by the Independent Police Complaints Commission. I have no faith in any of these inquiries.*

*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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25 Jun 2013 14.15 BST

## Question:

Hello Rob Evans,

As an investigative reporter how do you find and keep your sources?  
Were you expecting such a big story?

Cheers



**aelci33**

25 June 2013 1:55pm

## Rob Evans replies:

■ ■ *The key is trust. While we have been working on the stories about undercover police over the last two years, many people have trusted us with information (often very personal). I hope that we have repaid their trust.*

*Never expected what has happened over the last few days.*



25 Jun 2013 14:12 BST

## Question:

Peter

How can someone give informed consent to sex with someone who is lying about who they are?

Surely the government owes the children resulting from officers instigating affairs maintenance, and their mothers compensation?



**avatar**

**Pagey**

25 June 2013 1:25pm

## Peter Francis replies:

■ ■ *In a word, you can't give informed consent if that person is lying to you, in whatever form that lie may take.*

*Be it me pretending to be an activist, or a married man pretending he is single or a star football player when he is no such thing, for the purposes of having sex.*

*But 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. I never said I wanted to spend the rest of my life with them or wanted to father children with them.*

*I spent five, sometimes six evenings a week with my targets, over a period of four years. Often, with a lot of drinking, partying, and socialising taking place within a very care-free environment . During that time, I had two casual sexual encounters - they were both one night-stands.*

25 Jun 2013 14.05 BST

### Question:

Can Peter and Rob tell how they first came into contact with one another, and then came to release this story. Thank you



**Duncan Mirams**

25 June 2013 1:55pm

### Rob Evans replies:

## Hello Duncan

*Peter approached myself and my colleague Paul Lewis in early 2011 after we started writing about Mark Kennedy. We then decided to write a book which contained this story. [The book - Undercover - out today!](#) (shameless plug...)*

25 Jun 2013 14.03 BST

### Question:

Did you ever find yourself having any sympathy with the view of those you were spying on? If so, how much?



**BarkingMad**

25 June 2013 12:23pm

### Peter Francis replies:

## *At no stage did I develop what is termed 'Stockholm Syndrome', which basically means converting to the beliefs of the people you are infiltrating. But yes, I did have some sympathy with some of the campaigns that I was involved with, particularly those that involved alleged police brutality against suspects that resulted in their deaths.*

*Having myself been on the front-line of protests (posing as a demonstrator) I witnessed and felt the full force of public order policing.*

25 Jun 2013 13.57 BST

### Question:

Are there any good, easily understandable and easily provable reasons to believe that these practices are not still taking place?

Or are they still taking place to your knowledge?



**rah90**

25 June 2013 1:18pm

**Peter Francis replies:**

*■ I have got absolutely no knowledge of current undercover police operations. The Met always respond to these issues with ‘we will not confirm or deny’, which in normal-speak I think means officers are still being deployed against political activists.*

*But there has been no suggestion - from anyone - that the National Public Order Intelligence Unit has been disbanded. The NPOIU came from the SDS.*



25 Jun 2013 13.56 BST

**Question:**

I'm curious as to what the support is for undercover officers, particularly coping with conflicting identities / narratives of who you are. How were you grounded after submerging so much of yourself in an alias. Did you have to have regular counselling to keep you functioning?



**lookoutmountain**

25 June 2013 1:13pm

**Peter Francis replies:**

*■ There was absolutely no support for us when I was deployed. Our therapy was a discussion down the pub with several pints of beer - fellow SDS officers will well remember our sessions at the Pack Horse pub in Chiswick.*

*I brought a legal case (with another SDS officer) citing the lack of support for the returning officers. The Met, as ever, denied that they failed to give us support, but they settled out of court.*

*I was personally informed in October 2007 that since my deployment they introduced a psychological support package.*



Updated at 14.08 BST

25 Jun 2013 13.52 BST

**Question:**

At the moment there aren't plans for an independent investigation. Can the general public really hope to ever find out the truth without one? Or at all? It would seem to me that with all the information surrounding the kind of undercover work you and others took part in hidden for so long that the chances of ever really knowing the extent of these operations is slim without people coming forward.



**Shaun Dent**

25 June 2013 12:45pm

**Peter Francis replies:**

■ ■ *No, absolutely no hope of ever finding out the truth without a proper inquiry.*

*I read that Mick Creedon, who is running the Met's internal inquiry, does not even know whether his findings will be made public.*

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25 Jun 2013 13.51 BST

**Question:**

Can you clarify whether you know or merely assume the purpose of your investigation of the Lawrence family was to smear them? If it is an assumption is this because of widespread other smearing of complainants? alternatively could the investigation have been just to get background on the complainants? The latter would be an abuse, but smearing would be disgusting and in a different league.



**bob1016**

25 June 2013 12:44pm

**Peter Francis replies:**

■ ■ *Gathering intelligence secretly about campaigns, and then using that to potentially undermine them are separated, by a very thin line.*

*Had I have found out anything detrimental - and newsworthy - about the Lawrence family, the police, using the media then, would have used that information to smear the family.*

*My superiors were after any intelligence of that order. That was made clear to me. But I would just like to clarify, the Lawrences were not unique in this. The same went for the other justice campaigns that I have already said I infiltrated.*

*I would suggest journalists read back some of the information leaked to the press at the time about some of these campaigns run by relatives - and seriously question where they came from and why.*

*They should also look back at how some of the tabloids reported the Lawrence death very early on - I know that changed as the campaign progressed.*

 **Share**

Updated at 13.51 BST

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25 Jun 2013 13.43 BST

**Question:**

What outcome would you like to see as a result of your whistleblowing? Is a Leveson style inquiry enough?



**Aristeiaa**

25 June 2013 1:07pm

**Peter Francis replies:**

■ ■ Yes - 100%. That is the only thing that will bring out what the SDS has been doing since 1968 - but also the National Public Order Intelligence Unit, which still operates today. All of it has been done in the name of the public interest - supposedly.

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Updated at 13.45 BST

25 Jun 2013 13.38 BST

**Question:**

What do you think is likely to happen now? Do you think this will enable other whistleblowers to come forward after previously being threatened?



avatar

**KingMillross**

25 June 2013 1:19pm

**Peter Francis replies:**

■ ■ I think the Metropolitan Police and the government are happy that this is currently in the long grass, hoping that by 2016 - the date have said their inquiry will conclude - that most of the allegations will have been forgotten.

I personally think you will have more whistleblowers come out - but only if there is a proper public inquiry called. That is why I believe there is an overriding reluctance to call one.

There is a lot of controversy now about government spies looking at text messages and emails. Although an issue of concern, the intrusion is nothing like what me and fellow SDS officers tasked to do.

Let me give you a specific example. One of my targets, who I was speaking on the telephone to, would not say over the line their plans for a demonstration. He feared the phone was bugged. Instead, he invited me around his house, we watched a film together and had a pizza. Then he told me all about it.

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25 Jun 2013 13.32 BST

**Question:**

In the light of Scotland Yard commissioner Sir Bernard Hogan-Howe stating he didnt watch the documentary and Lord Condon denial of any knowledge of the events .. Do you think the Met will change ? Do anything ?



**David Maurice Edward Braithwaite**

25 June 2013 1:02pm

## Peter Francis replies:

■ I am very surprised that Bernard Hogan-Howe didn't take the time to watch the programme. If he had done, he may have seen the harm and serious damage that the authorised SDS deployments have done to several very brave women.

I cannot know exactly what Lord Condon did and didn't know about what the SDS was doing.

However, it does surprise me greatly that he can't seem to remember actually visiting the SDS in its safe-house, shortly after the major Welling Demonstration in October 1993. As I remember it, the demonstration was fully discussed, including the impact that the death of Stephen Lawrence was having in galvanising left-wing support against the BNP.

It doesn't seem like the kind of meeting a commissioner would forget. He was specifically requested asked not to wear his uniform when he came to our safehouse in Balcombe Street in Marylebone. This was so he could arrive incognito.

He also gave the unit a bottle of whisky as a mark of gratitude for the accurate intelligence we provided him. I hope his official diaries will help him remember.

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25 Jun 2013 13.29 BST

### **Question:**

Was there a point at which you were tempted to quit the force due to your reservations about your undercover work, and if so, when did you decide to to continue for the purposes of then becoming a whistleblower?



**Tucks28**

25 June 2013 12:58pm

## Peter Francis replies:

■ 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.

Brian died after an encounter with police and his family were campaigning for the case to be properly investigated. There were allegations/suspicions about how he died.

This was one of 'black justice' campaigns that I had infiltrated at the order of my superior officers.

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 to zero of ever receiving any form of justice. To this day, I personally feel that family has never had the justice they deserved. The same applies to the family of Wayne Douglas and their campaign.

25 Jun 2013 13:19 BST

### Question:

Hi Peter, thanks for coming online to answer our questions today.

On Channel 4's Dispatches last night, you met some of the women who had been [alias girlfriends of the undercover police officer Bob Lambert](#). This came across a quite an emotional or at least tense meeting - did it change how you felt about some of the women you'd had sexual relationships with during your time as an undercover officer? What do you hope would come out of a public inquiry into undercover policing of protest which would help relieve the trauma these women have been through? Do you believe there are still undercover officers using alias girlfriends & children in this way? Thanks again for answering these questions.



avatar

**hrwaldram**

25 June 2013 12:23pm

### Peter Francis replies:

*■ I reiterate that I now think that no undercover police officers should be targeting political campaigners.*

*However if a public inquiry deems it is still necessary, I believe that the use of casual sex by undercover police may be warranted in very exceptional circumstances.*

*But I do not see any circumstance that long term relationships - and especially the fathering of children - can be condoned or allowed.*

*With regard to me meeting the women who had relationships with SDS officers, I found them exceptionally brave. I had difficulty looking at them in the eyes and trying to justify what other SDS officers had done to them, considering that these women were not terrorists, or hardened criminals.*

*My one reservation about coming out in this public way was not overshadowing the women's campaign, which to me is as important and upsetting to them, as the Lawrence family have found the invasion into their lives.*

25 Jun 2013 13:17 BST

### Question:

Why did you take all this time?



avatar

**Sundiata**

25 June 2013 12:29pm

### Peter Francis replies:

■ 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.

But the main reason is that since having my nervous breakdown in 2001 (a result of the stresses of the deployment and my failed attempts to try to reintegrate myself into the police service as 'Peter Black'), I now only reached a position where I feel that I am mentally and physically strong enough, to be able to deal with what they might throw at me.

 Share

25 Jun 2013 13:12 BST

#### **Question:**

Do you think of your name as Peter Francis or Black?



**doloresGC**

25 June 2013 12:21pm

### Peter Francis replies:

■ That is a harder question than it should be. The impact psychologically is to this day, I feel more like Peter Black than I do Peter Francis.

But maybe participation in blowing the whistle will one day allow me to fully move on and become Peter Francis again.

 Share

25 Jun 2013 13:10 BST

You can also post your questions to one of the journalists behind the story, who is taking part in the webchat alongside Peter Francis.

Hi I'm Rob Evans, I've been working with my colleague Paul Lewis on this story. I am here to answer questions as well



**RobEvans**

25 June 2013 1:04pm

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Updated at 13:10 BST

25 Jun 2013 13:07 BST

## Question:

What do you know about the work of Police agent provocateurs during demonstrations? I've seen video evidence of this happening in London.



avatar

**Swanmaster**

25 June 2013 12:14pm

## **Peter Francis responds:**

*During my time deployed as an SDS undercover officer, I never came across a single example of any colleague ever doing anything that could be deemed as being an agent provocateur. And should any such activity ever have come to light, that officer would have been immediately removed from the unit.*

*If some of the alleged activities of Mark Kennedy had taken place whilst I was deployed, he would have been removed from the unit.*

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25 Jun 2013 13.05 BST

## **The Q&A is now underway.**

### Question:

Its clear you have some reservations about what you did as an undercover cop and how the intelligence you provided was used, but how did you feel about it at the time? Were you able to convince your self that what you were doing was in the public interest and if not how did you justify it to your self?



**karaline**

25 June 2013 12:12pm

## **Peter Francis responds:**

*I was required to provide intelligence on those deemed “subversives”. The description at the time was anybody that was deemed to pose a threat to the state, possibly risking overthrowing it by non-democratic means. In practice that was a loose term, only made worse now with the terminology of “domestic extremists”.*

*People who are now mainstream politicians were, at their start of their political careers, deemed to be subversive by the Special Branch - to name one: Jack Straw. 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 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.*

*(This is subject to the files not having been shredded since I left the Special Branch.)*

*I had reservations in some areas even beginning with the use of a dead child's identity as my own. But at the time I ignored that.*

*The SDS remit at the time was to prevent public disorder - and officers at the time felt that was the justification for our undercover work.*

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

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Updated at 13.09 BST

25 Jun 2013 11.57 BST

Former undercover officer Peter Francis [revealed this week how he was part of a secret operation](#) to dig for "dirt" on the family of murdered black teenager Stephen Lawrence. For four years, he infiltrated anti-racist groups for a covert Scotland Yard unit known as the Special Demonstration Squad. He is the first spy from the unit to blow the whistle on its activities.

He will be online answering readers' questions **from 1pm BST** (8am ET), alongside Rob Evans, co-author of the new book [Undercover: The True Story of Britain's Secret Police](#).

Please post your questions in the comments section below.

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Updated at 12.03 BST

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