



Opinion Metropolitan police

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The Met's undercover police wrecked the lives of many deceived women

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Will public outrage at the attempt to smear the Lawrence family lead to a full inquiry at which the scandal of infiltration is probed?

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📷 Protesters in 2011 call for a judge-led inquiry into the use of undercover policing. Photograph: John Stillwell/PA

The Guardian's investigation into phone hacking had been running for a long time, mainly ignored by the rest of the media until it was revealed that Milly Dowler, the murdered schoolgirl, had, posthumously, been [one of the hackers' victims](#). Suddenly the story broke through, reaching people who had previously been unmoved. Politicians, including the prime minister, until then studiously mute on the subject, now felt obliged to speak and to promise to act.

It seems as if the revelation of a secret operation to [smear the family of Stephen Lawrence](#) will do the same for the long-running investigation by Paul Lewis and Rob Evans into the undercover police of special branch. Once again, the victim commands universal respect and sympathy: the Lawrence family now, the Dowlers then. Once again, this is an act that no one can defend. At last the Lewis and Evans revelations - of a wing of the police force that was a law unto itself - will get the attention they deserve.

The current focus on the violation of the Lawrences is entirely justified. To smear a family in mourning represents a moral low of a very deep kind. It's hard to reject the arguments for a full inquiry, rather than a mere expansion of Operation Herne, the current probe of the police conducted by the police themselves. Indeed, David Cameron and Theresa May would be well-advised to establish one now, rather than resist - as Cameron did on phone hacking - only to concede eventually.

But if there is to be such an inquiry, let it include the full record of the Met's special demonstration squad. It should especially probe the cases brought by about a dozen women who say they were deceived into relationships by undercover policemen - and in some cases gave birth to their children -

whose sole purpose was to gain the trust of the activist groups they sought to infiltrate. Speak to the women involved, **as I have done**, and you are left in no doubt at the scale of the damage done, measured in broken trust, if not broken lives.

The truth is the Lawrence revelations are the tip of a very ugly iceberg, one that too many have ignored or attempted to shrug off for too long. A Telegraph blogpost in January by Cristina Odone, suggested that the deceived women **should consider themselves lucky**, as they were "hairy and smelly activists whose only hope for sex lies in being targeted by undercover policemen trying to extract their secrets".

So let there be that full inquiry. But it must be sure to explore every aspect of this disgraceful chapter in the Met's history, no matter how dark.



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