

Anger at decision not to prosecute police officers for killing unarmed London man

Keith Lee

9 December 2000

The family of Harry Stanley, shot dead by armed police in Hackney last September, have expressed anger at the decision of the Crown Prosecution Service (CPS) not to charge any of the officers involved. Jason Stanley, Harry's son, said, "It just proves that nobody is safe on the streets. If this can happen to my dad, it can happen to anyone. When will someone be accountable for their actions?"

Harry Stanley (46) was killed on September 22. He had just been released from hospital after undergoing an operation for cancer. At 7:45 p.m. he left the pub on the way home to watch a football match. His house was only 600 yards away. He was carrying a coffee table leg in a plastic bag. Someone had allegedly phoned the police to say Harry was carrying a shotgun.

As he reached the junction of Victoria Park Road and Freemont Street, two armed police officers from Scotland Yard's specialist SO19 firearms team pulled up behind him. Both were carrying Glock 9mm self-loading pistols. The police say they challenged Harry twice as he turned towards his home. Two shots were fired. One hit him in the hand and the other in the head, killing him instantly. At the time of the shooting the police were just 15 feet away.

A doctor who came out of his house to attend the victim was told by police to get back inside. Harry's body was left on the pavement well into the night. Even when the police knew his identity, the family was not told until the next day. His wife and children even unknowingly walked past his partially covered body on their way home.

At one point, police offered to pay for the funeral but then withdrew the offer. Rumours were also circulated that Harry had wanted to "commit suicide by police shooting".

Police guidelines state that, "only reasonable force

should be used" in making an arrest, yet the CPS justified their decision not to prosecute the officers involved by claiming that there was "insufficient evidence" against them. Some witnesses have complained of pressure being put on them by the police to sign statements saying they had not seen or heard anything regarding the shooting.

During the last year alone armed police were deployed in London on 1,345 occasions and 23 people have been shot dead nationally by the police since 1992. In the majority of cases, the suspects are found to be unarmed or are carrying replica weapons.

Prosecutions of the police are extremely rare. Only in two cases have they faced charges for a shooting they have carried out. In the case of David Ewin, shot dead in his car in South London in February 1995, the jury in the first trial failed to reach a verdict and the police officer involved was acquitted at a second trial. Police officers face manslaughter charges after shooting dead the unarmed James Ashley in January 1998. The trial is expected to take place in 2001.

The Stanley family is now thinking of mounting a legal challenge to the CPS decision. Their solicitor said, "The family is considering a judicial review of this remarkable decision by the CPS, who appear to be protecting police officers from the criminal justice system by applying the most conservative approach possible to the law and the evidence.

"The family asks that the Metropolitan Police Commissioner confirm that he will be publishing in the public interest the full report prepared by Surrey Police into the shooting of Harry Stanley."

Deborah Coles, co-director of the pressure group Inquest, said, "This unbelievable decision follows a pattern of cases where police officers whose conduct has led to death have not been subjected to proper

scrutiny and shows that the rule of law does not apply to police officers. How can we accept that the shooting dead of an unarmed man does not result in a criminal trial where a jury decides whether or not the actions were unlawful? The Human Rights Act should lead to a greater protection of people's rights, particularly the right to life. These unaccounted for police killings show that the current system for investigating deaths in custody is merely a paper exercise and unworthy of any public confidence."

Harry's wife, Irene Stanley, said of the decision, "I have lost half my life, so have my children and my grandchildren, while those officers go back home at night to their families. I want to see them brought to trial in the same way as anyone else would."

Irene told the *World Socialist Web Site*, "I thought justice would have been done and I am just going to keep fighting. I am not giving up because I think they should be tried like everybody else, like one of the public. I do not see why they should be treated differently because they are police. It is not the first time they've got away with it, and I think its wrong.

"My husband was shot dead for nothing, for a piece of wood. He had colon cancer and had survived through that. On the Monday before he had had 20 stitches removed from his stomach and on the Wednesday he got shot he was able to walk only very slowly. He could not even raise his hands in the air [to surrender].

"We have not been treated fairly. When Harry was shot, the police were asking everyone that came to see me for their names and addresses. I do not think we have had time to grieve as a family, because the police were in the house all the time. I felt that we were under investigation. I felt guilty, as though we had done something wrong as a family and we had not done anything wrong at all. It was the police that killed my husband.

"I think it was after a few months that they put rumours around that my husband committed suicide because he had cancer. My husband was 100 percent clear of colon cancer and there was no reason he would do that. He was happy and looking forward to the kids getting bigger and seeing his grandchildren growing up. He loved life and the next thing he is shot down dead.

"I am hoping for justice at the end of this. That is what we are fighting for. Two officers should stand trial for what they done. They get away with it every single

time and it's got to stop. The community in Hackney is disgusted with this. I can see riots happening, because people are just getting fed up. If it can happen to Harry it can happen to anyone."



To contact the WSWs and the
Socialist Equality Party visit:

wsws.org/contact