

Britain: government lies exposed over de Menezes murder

Socialist Equality Party (Britain)
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Documents and photographs leaked to ITV News demonstrate that the entire story used by the police, the media and the government to excuse the killing of the young Brazilian Jean Charles de Menezes in London was a lie.

On every important detail, what the public were told was a fabrication. Rather than the accidental victim of an anti-terror operation, de Menezes was the victim of a state execution. The aim of this operation was to send a message to the British public that democratic rights count for nothing—a message that was made explicit by Prime Minister Tony Blair when he declared that the “rules of the game” have now changed.

In the immediate aftermath of de Menezes’ killing on July 22, media reports, supposedly backed by eyewitnesses, claimed that the young Brazilian had been seen leaving the home of a suspected terrorist wearing a bulky overcoat on a hot day. When challenged by police at Stockwell subway station, he had attempted to run, jumping a ticket barrier, before being overpowered and shot multiple times in the head in order to prevent the possible detonation of a bomb.

Statements and photographs leaked from the official Independent Police Complaints Commission (IPCC) being held into the shooting show that none of this is true.

De Menezes left his flat and boarded a bus on his way to work, from which point he was placed under surveillance and followed. The only reason given for this by the police is that he had “Mongolian eyes” and looked like a suspect. Also contrary to previous claims, everything that took place at Stockwell station was captured on CCTV. This footage shows:

- * De Menezes was not wearing a belt or jacket that could have concealed weapons—he was wearing a denim jacket.

- * At no point was he challenged by the police, all of whom were in plain clothes. This flatly contradicts the statement made by Metropolitan Police Commissioner Sir Ian Blair that he refused to obey police instructions.

- * De Menezes did not leap over the ticket barrier to the underground station where the shooting took place but entered normally. He did not run away from the police, as he was completely unaware he was being followed. Rather, he picked up a free newspaper as he slowly descended the elevator to the platform.

- * De Menezes did not trip or stumble as he ran on to the train

in an attempt to evade arrest, thus allowing police to “capture” him. Instead he had boarded the train and was seated when he was shot through the head.

At this point accounts in the documents differ slightly as to what happened. One version states that a police officer walked up to de Menezes and, without warning, shot him repeatedly in the head. Another paints a conflicting but equally chilling picture.

A policeman from the surveillance team who was following de Menezes states: “I heard shouting which included the word ‘police’ and turned to face the male in the denim jacket...

“He immediately stood up and advanced towards me and the CO19 [firearms squad] officers.... I grabbed the male in the denim jacket by wrapping both my arms around his torso, pinning his arms to his side. I then pushed him back on to the seat where he had been previously sitting.... I then heard a gun shot very close to my left ear and was dragged away on to the floor of the carriage.”

Even if this version of events is true, there was no reason to shoot de Menezes as he was restrained and could not explode a bomb.

ITV News showed photographs of the dead man lying on the floor inside the train with blood on the seat where he had been sitting. He was not shot five times in the head as the press said at the time. According to ITV News, he was shot eight times, seven in the head and one in the shoulder, at close range by two firearms officers.

No one has taken responsibility for wrongly identifying de Menezes as a terrorist. The officer responsible for operating the surveillance cameras targeting the block of flats claims that he was “relieving” himself when de Menezes left home and asked for someone else to check his identity.

However, it is clear that someone at the highest level had taken the decision to implement the shoot-to-kill policy secretly developed more than two years ago—using the pretext provided by the July 7 terror bombings in London. Someone was going to be killed that day and, as it turned out, it did not particularly matter who it was.

The papers state that “gold command made the decision and gave appropriate instructions that de Menezes was to be prevented from entering the tube system. At this stage the

operation moved to code red tactic, responsibility was handed over to CO19.”

Gold command, based at Metropolitan Police headquarters, is the secretive body charged with giving the go-ahead for shoot-to-kill operations under what is known as “Operation Kratos.”

The documents quote the commanding officer of CO19 as telling his team “that they may be required to use unusual tactics today because of the environment they were in.” Asked to clarify, he is reported to have replied: “If we were deployed to intercept a subject and there was an opportunity to challenge, but if the subject was noncompliant, a critical shot may be taken.”

Events demonstrate that de Menezes was never given a chance to comply with the police. Right up to the moment he was killed, he could have had no idea of what was about to happen to him. Contrary to stated policy, no attempts were made to stop him when he left his flat and board a bus to the train station, even though he was supposed to be a potential terrorist.

Immediate responsibility for de Menezes’ killing must be laid at the door of the firearms squad and their commanding officers. But political and moral responsibility for this crime rests squarely with Blair and his government.

Not only did the government covertly establish new guidelines allowing police to act as judge, jury and executioner. They subsequently justified de Menezes’ killing and unconditionally defended the police by endorsing a version of events now exposed as a pack of lies.

They could do so with impunity because they knew that no one within the political establishment or the media would challenge them, particularly under conditions where a concerted campaign was being waged to insist that national unity was the only permitted response in the aftermath of the July 7 bombings. Even after the ITV News revelations, not a single Labour or opposition member of parliament was prepared to speak out. All accepted the official line of the police and the government that any comment would prejudice the Complaints Commission inquiry.

Such claims are cynical in the extreme. All that will emerge from the IPCC is a cover-up. In the meantime, the silence of the political establishment and the media enables the government to put in place all the elements for a police state.

Working people must draw the most fundamental lessons from the assassination of Jean Charles de Menezes. An entirely innocent man, whose only crime was to live in the wrong block of flats, was summarily executed with no one held to account. Moreover, Metropolitan Police Chief Blair has made clear that the same “code red tactic” implemented in the murder of de Menezes was used on seven other occasions in the recent period, and in each case police came close to opening fire.

The abrogation of democratic rights has reached the point where the type of death squads associated with South American dictatorships or with Britain’s occupation of Northern Ireland

are being used on the streets of London. And things will not end there. Measures announced by Blair on August 5 will be used to criminalise all forms of political dissent. The government intends to give itself unprecedented powers to deport and exclude any foreign national or naturalised citizen it deems a potential security threat and to extend the use of virtual house arrest against British citizens. It will be able to ban organisations and publications on the vague pretext that they “condone” terrorism, and close places of worship. It will respond to any legal challenge to these proposals by abrogating the Human Rights Act.

Those responsible for the de Menezes killing must be brought to account. But this cannot be accomplished by relying on the IPCC or any other legal body.

The lies employed to justify the state execution of de Menezes are only a link in the chain of lies used by the British and US governments to justify their predatory war in Iraq and ongoing “war against terror.” Both London and Washington have developed a modus operandi that is not limited by any commitment to traditional democratic norms. Opposed by a majority of the population, these governments uphold the interests of a tiny financial elite that seek to enrich themselves through rapacious plunder of the world’s resources and the ever more brutal exploitation of the working class.

The imposition of these policies, which are antithetical to the interests of the vast majority of the population, cannot be reconciled with the preservation of democracy. It demands new forms of rule based in the most profound sense on lawlessness and criminality. This is what now confronts working people.

Everything depends on the development of an independent political movement of the working class, the axis of which must be opposition to the profit system—that is the source of the drive towards war and the assault on civil liberties.



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