

The lessons of the July 7 London bombings and the state murder of Jean Charles de Menezes

Julie Hyland
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Below we publish the greetings delivered by Julie Hyland to the election meeting of the Partei für Soziale Gleichheit—PSG (Socialist Equality Party of Germany) in Berlin on September 3.

Hyland is a member of the Central Committee of the Socialist Equality Party in Britain and a member of the WSWs International Editorial Board. Her report addresses the political situation in Britain following the July 7 terror attacks in London and the July 22 police shoot-to-kill operation that resulted in the murder of Brazilian citizen Jean Charles de Menezes.

I bring the greetings of the Socialist Equality Party in Britain to this meeting and our support for the election campaign being waged by our comrades in the Partei für Soziale Gleichheit.

Faced with substantial popular opposition to its agenda 2010, the SPD-Green coalition government determined that it would rather hand over power to the conservative opposition than be deflected from its course. In ruling in favour of Chancellor Gerhard Schroeder, the Constitutional Court has let it be known that the German bourgeoisie too has determined that the scale of the social attacks now required can only be carried through by a regime that is immune from popular pressure, and is seeking to establish the legal framework to this end.

Though it takes a different form, in Britain this same drive is taking place at great speed. So much so that the Britain of today is virtually unrecognisable from what it was even six months ago. Civil liberties standards established over hundreds of years are being swept aside.

The pretext for these unprecedented changes was the July 7 suicide bombings in London and a failed attempted bombing on July 21.

The July 7 bombings, which killed 56 people, were a reactionary act, deliberately targeted at innocent people going about their daily lives. But such an attack was entirely foreseeable. The tens of millions of antiwar protesters in Britain and internationally who marched against the preemptive attack on Iraq had warned of the catastrophic consequences of war, not least that the destabilisation of Iraq and the whole of the Middle East would increase the risk of terrorist attacks.

Blair arrogantly dismissed the overwhelming popular hostility to his war drive, famously proclaiming that democratic government was now defined by a readiness to ignore the wishes of the people.

As he rushed from one capital city to the next, casting himself as a world statesman, the prime minister was convinced that Iraq would be a joyride, and that on the coattails of the Bush administration, Britain would be able to carve out its share of the oil revenues in this strategic country.

It is a matter of record that the war was prepared on the basis of lies. There was no connection between Saddam Hussein and 9/11, much less with Al Qaeda. And, despite the solemn assurances of Blair, Bush and others, Iraq—a country that had been held deliberately in a state of semi-starvation by UN sanctions over the proceeding decade—did not possess

any weapons of mass destruction.

Assuming the role of liar in chief, Blair ensured that Britain's intelligence and security departments were given over to systematic falsification to justify pre-determined war aims.

His slavish subservience to US imperialism and the financial interests of British capital blinded Blair to geo-political realities. Iraq was transformed into a bloody quagmire, in which tens of thousands of people have been killed. And in Abu Ghraib, Guantánamo Bay and other torture camps, the sickening reality of Bush and Blair's "new world order" has been made plain.

We have made the point that after the Second World War, the decision to launch aggressive war as a means of achieving strategic policy objectives was deemed to be the Nazis' ultimate crime from which all others inexorably flowed. On these grounds, leaders of the Third Reich were hung by their necks until they were dead.

Blair is no less guilty of war crimes and morally and politically culpable for all subsequent events.

Iraq, terrorism and the attack on democratic rights

In every sense, the British people are being made to reap the whirlwind sown by Blair's criminal policies. The war *has* indeed destabilised the Middle East and inflamed ethnic and religious tensions within the UK—the outcome of which was July 7.

That four young British men from immigrant families were attracted to religious extremism and were prepared to blow themselves up says much about the social and political reality of Blair's Britain.

But any examination of this reality has been declared out of order by the ruling elite, which responded to July 7 by whipping up an atmosphere of fear and panic and denouncing anyone making a connection between the bombings and the Iraq war as apologists for terrorism.

Such a degree of cross-party unity was established that you could be forgiven for thinking there was a national coalition government. Not one major opposition figure, Labour backbencher or newspaper columnist challenged Blair's declaration that the US and Britain were engaged in an ideological war with an evil fundamentalism determined to overthrow western civilisation—a presentation of issues that virtually mirrors the claims of Osama bin Laden.

The government has a vested interest in ensuring the waters remain muddy. It is cynically utilising the threat of terrorism—a threat it is responsible for—to implement measures usually associated with a police state.

We now know that on July 7 the Special Contingencies Committee—nicknamed Cobra—was convened. This secretive body draws its powers from the Civil Contingencies Act that came into effect in 2004. Dubbed Britain's version of the USA Patriot Act, this enables the declaration of a state of emergency without a parliamentary vote, the introduction of virtually unlimited emergency regulations without recourse to parliament, and the deployment of the armed services without prior parliamentary debate or approval.

Blair has said that the UK is in a perpetual state of emergency and we know that after July 7, army special forces were deployed—specifically the Special Reconnaissance Regiment (SRR) set up in April.

Based alongside the SAS, the unit has its roots in Britain's dirty war in Northern Ireland, including the notorious Force Research Unit that worked with Loyalist hit squads in a campaign of murder against republicans and civil rights activists. According to one newspaper report at the time of its formation, the unit was meant to infiltrate organisations and “once SRR surveillance teams have identified human targets, other units will then eliminate them.”

Cold-blooded murder

The implications of this were made graphically clear on July 22, when 27-year-old Brazilian worker Jean Charles de Menezes was murdered in cold blood by police in a south London subway. The SRR was involved in the surveillance operation.

His death caused a deep sense of shock. You don't have to accept the rose-tinted version of British policemen usually portrayed on TV and in adverts to understand just what a sharp change such actions represented.

Just hours after de Menezes killing, Metropolitan Police Commissioner Sir Ian Blair claimed that it was “directly linked to the ongoing and expanding anti-terrorist operation” following the July 7 attacks. Confirming that top government and security officials had secretly agreed two years before to the adoption of shoot to kill policies, he warned that more deaths could follow.

Even when it became clear that the young worker had no connection with terrorism, the police merely issued a cursory apology whilst the government and the media defended the killing. It was claimed repeatedly that de Menezes brought suspicion on himself by leaving a building placed under surveillance by anti-terror police wearing a heavy coat on a warm day and by attempting to flee arrest by vaulting a ticket barrier. These actions, it was claimed, were cause enough to give police reason to believe that he was a suicide bomber who must be killed to prevent him from detonating a bomb.

Leaked documents from the Independent Police Complaints Commission (IPCC) show that every one of these claims was a lie. Jean Charles was wearing a light denim jacket. He did not know that the block of flats in which he lived was under surveillance, nor that he was tailed for at least half an hour to the subway station by plain clothes officers. This included him traveling on a bus for at least 20 minutes—a strange thing for police to allow a suspected suicide bomber to do in the wake of the July 7 bombings.

He walked leisurely into the tube and rather than vault the ticket barrier, he used his swipe card as usual. He did not run away from police, as he was completely unaware he was being followed.

Jean Charles was actually seated on the train when armed plainclothes men burst through the doors. This would have been the first point at which he became aware anything untoward was taking place. Under new guidelines, armed police do not issue a warning that they will shoot—they just do it.

In the next seconds, Jean Charles was pinned in his seat by one officer, whilst two others pointed their guns at point blank range at his head. Within moments he was dead, his brains blown out in full view of terrified commuters. We now know that ten bullets in total were fired, seven into his skull.

As the various police agencies fall out between themselves, more information has come to light. It has been confirmed that police trailing Jean Charles considered that he did not pose any immediate threat. Still the order was given by Gold Command in Scotland Yard for armed officers to take over.

No one has claimed responsibility for wrongly identifying Jean Charles as a potential bomber. Police claims that CCTV cameras on the station were not working, so no tapes of events are available, have been bitterly denied by London Underground workers.

Jean Charles was not the accidental victim of a bungled anti-terror operation, much less another victim of the July 7 bombers as the media have tried to claim. Someone at the highest level authorised the implementation of shoot-to-kill that day.

The fact that there was no evidence tying the young worker to any terrorist activities, that those tailing him did not even get a proper look at him (one has said he was relieving himself when he was meant to be okaying Jean Charles' identity) leads to only one conclusion. It did not really matter who ended up dead, but someone was going to die.

Blair changes “the rules of the game”

The objective was to reinforce Prime Minister Blair's insistence that “the rules of the game have now changed.”

A statement by the Socialist Equality Party on August 18 brought out the ramifications of this event. “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 is being used on the streets of London. And things will not end there. Measures announced by Blair will be used to criminalise all forms of political dissent.”

Even before July 7, the government had introduced control orders—a form of house arrest imposed against those who have not been charged let alone convicted of any crime, but are suspected of terrorism. And in December, the Court of Appeal had ruled that the British state could use evidence in court from other countries regardless of whether it had been obtained by torture or ill-treatment.

The lies employed to justify the murder of Jean Charles 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. Now the full significance of Blair's so-called “battle of ideologies” becomes apparent. Through this smokescreen, the government is essentially introducing a new charge of thought crime whose aim is to outlaw opposition and dissent.

Last week Home Secretary Charles Clarke outlined a series of anti-terror measures which target anyone deemed to present an indirect threat to national security, public order, the rule of law or the UK's good relations with a third country. The home secretary will be able to deport foreign nationals to countries with notorious human rights records, if he considers them to be guilty of “unacceptable behaviours”. This list of behaviours includes “fomenting, justifying or glorifying terrorist violence in furtherance of particular beliefs” and “fostering hatred which might lead to inter-community violence in the UK”.

The government has no responsibility to prove a direct connection with terrorist acts or groups before individuals can be arrested or deported and organisations proscribed.

Any non-British citizen or naturalised British citizen expressing views considered illegitimate by the government in any form—whether writing, publishing or distributing material, speaking in public, running a website—can now be targeted.

Blair has also expressed approval for extending the period in which people can be held by police without charge from 14 days to three months and for new court procedures to be introduced where pre-trial hearings can be held in closed non-jury courts.

The prime minister has threatened to take on the judges if they try and challenge the new measures. Last December Britain's Law Lords, the highest court in the land, threw out the government's argument for imprisoning foreign nationals without trial, ruling that "Freedom from arbitrary arrest and detention is a quintessential British liberty" and that "the real threat to the life of the nation ... comes not from terrorism but from laws such as these."

Now Blair has warned that the government is prepared to suspend parts of the European Convention on Human Rights, on which Britain's Human Rights Act is based to get his measures through. When this was criticised by a UN official, the Home Secretary stated that "the human rights of those people who were blown up on the tube on July 7 are more important than the human rights of the people who committed these acts."

These measures are not aimed at people involved in terrorism, but at those holding views now considered unacceptable. So broad is the definition of unacceptable behaviours that anyone expressing political support for a struggle against British imperialism or its allies could be charged. Given that the war against Iraq was carried out in the name of combating a terrorist state, it is entirely possible that these measures could have been used against antiwar protesters.

In this context, the claims that Jean Charles' killing should not be "politicised," that people should trust the government and the police and await the outcome of the IPCC report into his death, is absurd. Especially when one considers that every previous judicial investigation and parliamentary inquiry into popularly contested measures taken by the state—including the Iraq war—have ended in a whitewash and paved the way for further atrocities.

Moreover, the chairman of the IPCC Nick Hardwick told the *Police Review*, of his firm hope that his investigation would strengthen police support for the IPCC.

As with 9/11, the government claims that because of July 7 everything has changed.

The threat presented by Al Qaeda now supposedly makes it impossible to preserve democratic and constitutional norms that survived two world wars, the threat of Nazi invasion and a terrorist campaign by the IRA spanning more than three decades. This included the 1979 assassinations of former Chief of Defence Staff Lord Mountbatten and shadow Northern Ireland secretary Airey Neave outside the House of Commons, and the attempt to kill almost the entire Conservative cabinet in the 1984 Brighton bombing.

However, Blair knows he faces no challenge from within the political establishment, despite the revelations over shoot-to-kill and the gunning down of an innocent man.

London Mayor Ken Livingstone has fully shed the radical baggage of his past and rushed to Blair's defence.

Frank Fields, Labour MP, has opined that the war on terrorism should be seen "as an evolving programme of measures spanning a period perhaps as long as the four decades of the cold war."

If the first stages of this evolving programme have already witnessed the erosion of the right to freedom of speech and worship, protection from arbitrary arrest, not to mention empowering the state to brutally exterminate anyone it sees fit, just what else does Mister Fields and the government envisage?

The decay of the workers' movement

Nowhere is the putrefaction of the official workers' movement more apparent than in Blair's Labour government which functions as an instrument of big capital against working people.

In alliance with the Bush administration, his government is leading an international offensive on the part of a financial oligarchy to plunder the world's resources. Its foreign policy is directly related to its domestic political agenda.

Previously, British imperialism carried out its most brutal crimes overseas in order to maintain its rule over the colonial masses but it was able to use the fruits of empire to secure a degree of social peace at home. There is no "guns and butter" policy today. The decline of British imperialism and that crisis of world capitalism mean no such distinction can be maintained.

The Blair government has led a full frontal assault on public services and welfare rights that has deepened social inequalities and sharply polarised British society. According to a report by the Office for National Statistics last month, the pay gap between rich and poor has widened by £90 a week since Labour came to power.

The imposition of policies antithetical to the interests of the vast majority of the population cannot be reconciled with the preservation of democracy. Blair is deeply unpopular and rests on an increasingly narrow and extremely privileged social base.

The resort to emergency government and new forms of rule based on lawlessness and criminality is the result of these social and political tensions.

Though the UK is spearheading this drive in Europe, its position is by no means unique, as we now see in Germany.

Under capitalism the globalisation of production is being used to benefit a tiny few at the direct expense of the impoverishment of hundreds of millions. The recent dispute at Heathrow airport by Gate Gourmet workers was illustrative in this regard. The US catering company had deliberately employed mainly Asian workers at its London base, whom it paid a pittance.

But Eastern European workers were even cheaper, so it provoked a confrontation with its workforce, sacked hundreds and implemented a lock-out. Thousands of fellow workers at Heathrow walked out in their support, paralysing one of the world's busiest airports. The unions were called in to strangle the dispute by declaring the strike illegal, insisting sympathy action was ended and creating conditions where Gate Gourmet will get all its demands, including getting rid of any workers it considers troublesome.

Such a state of affairs has its echo in every country and cannot continue indefinitely. The ruling class itself recognises this. That is why, however bitter the dispute between the major powers over aspects of foreign policy—in particular who is to get the lion's share of the world's riches—they are united in pressing ahead with increasingly draconian measures.

According to a *Statewatch* report, "The exceptional and draconian become the norm" and that the US is setting the benchmark for this through hidden discussions in the G8, with Britain leading the demand for compliance with this agenda within Europe itself.

But Bush and Blair are banging on open doors. In 2004 the European Union agreed to cooperate with Washington in revising legal norms so as to legitimise pre-emptive state action, including the creation of a new crime of committing "preparatory" acts—i.e., acts where no crime has been committed—and to change the law so that defendants will not know the evidence against them.

In March that same year, the EU appointed its own "Counter Terrorist Coordinator" whose remit was to make recommendations that "may

presuppose amendments or adjustments of existing legal or structural arrangements.”

The Convention on Terrorism was adopted in May 2005 and has been signed by twenty EU governments. This defines “public provocation to commit an act of terrorism” as involving the “distribution ... of a message to the public, with the intent to incite the commission of an act of terrorism, including where the message, although not directly advocating such acts, would be reasonably interpreted to have that effect.”

The EU has also recorded its support for the introduction of a specific crime of apologising for terrorism. A draft statement defines terrorism as those acting with the aim of “unduly compelling a government or international organisation to perform or abstain from performing any act.”

Clearly, mass protests against Hartz IV could fall under this heading. Of course the same strictures do not apply to the ruling elite—as witnessed in the policy of regime change against Afghanistan and Iraq.

The threat of terror and the onslaught on democratic rights requires ending the imperialist policies that have given rise to these in the first place. This means the immediate withdrawal of all foreign troops from Iraq, and the payment of millions in war reparations by the US and the UK. Bush and Blair are morally and politically culpable for commissioning an illegal war of aggression and must be tried for war crimes.

There must be an immediate end to the police-state measures that have been enacted under the guise of the war against terror. Those responsible for Jean Charles de Menezes murder must be held to account. Above all, this means Prime Minister Tony Blair himself, who created the political and ideological conditions in which it could take place and who has openly defended and justified this blatantly criminal act.

To look to any section of the ruling class or its state apparatus to carry out these vital measures would be the gravest folly. As the great revolutionist Rosa Luxemburg stated, the preservation of democracy is entirely bound up with the struggle against the capitalist profit system and the establishing of socialism.

It is necessary to revive the mass international antiwar movement, and to consciously seek to develop an independent political movement of the working class, based on the defense of democratic rights and the principles of internationalism and social equality.

That is why you should support the campaign of the PSG.



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