Britain: de Menezes' parents demand police stand trial for murder

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29 September 2005

The parents of Brazilian worker Jean Charles de Menezes have reiterated their demand that the police officers responsible for killing their son stand trial for murder. They have also called for Metropolitan Police Commissioner Sir Ian Blair to stand trial.

De Menezes' parents, Matuzinhos and Maria, along with five other relatives are making a two-week visit to the UK from Brazil to see where their son was killed.

The young worker was gunned down by police officers on July 22 while he was seated on a London Underground train. A total of eleven shots were fired without warning, seven at point blank range to his head. Afterwards, police admitted that a shoot-to-kill policy had been secretly adopted two years earlier. The police killing took place one day after several bombs planted in London apparently misfired, and fifteen days after a series of subway bombings killed more than 50 people in Britain's capital city.

In an interview with the *Daily Mirror*, 60-year-old Maria de Menezes told of her agony and outrage at her son's brutal murder and the fact that no one has been held accountable.

"My son was assassinated," she said. "The policemen who did this are nothing more than common killers. It is up to the British government to punish them."

Maria said it was "unbelievable" that the two firearms officers who killed her son were still at liberty, and had even been sent on holiday. "They should be arrested immediately and they should be in prison waiting for the judgement. We want to see them punished as killers. They must be tried in court for murder. They fired 11 shots at Jean. They wanted to kill him. It was certainly no accident."

Maria demanded that Metropolitan Police Commissioner Sir Ian Blair also stand trial. "Ian Blair should be put on trial for corporate manslaughter," she said. "He should be punished too. He is the head of police and he is responsible. He didn't tell the truth. He hid their mistakes and pretended my son was a terrorist."

Ian Blair appeared at a press conference shortly after de Menezes was gunned down and defended the killing, claiming that it was "directly linked" to an anti-terrorist operation in the wake of the July 7 bombings and the July 21 incidents.

At the same time, reports were circulated that de Menezes was a potential terrorist suspect, that he was dressed in a heavy coat on a warm day (so as to conceal a bomb), and that he had attempted to evade capture.

All these claims were proven to be lies. De Menezes' only crime was to live in a block of flats that had been placed under police surveillance following the bombings. There was nothing to connect him with terrorist offences, and the police had no reasons to believe otherwise.

Leaked videotape footage proved that de Menezes walked in a leisurely manner into the Underground station wearing a light denim jacket. He would have had no knowledge that he was being followed until he was set upon by plainclothes police.

Following these disclosures, the Metropolitan police issued a cursory statement apologising for de Menezes' death, whilst defending their actions.

Visiting the scene of her son's murder was "very, very hard," Maria de Menezes said, but added, "I don't want Jean to be forgotten. The police shouldn't be allowed to do this. I have come to make sure it doesn't happen again."

Jean's brother Giovani has also travelled with the family from Brazil. "There is no way we will ever forget Jean," he told the *Mirror*. "I had only one brother but he was worth a thousand."

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Calling for an end to the shoot-to-kill policy, Giovani said, “You can’t kill somebody without investigating or even knowing who they are. It must change. We are here to change the law before somebody else gets killed as they go about their business.”

The family’s trip has been paid for by Scotland Yard and they are expected to visit the Independent Police Complaints Commission (IPCC), which is investigating de Menezes’ killing, and to meet MPs in Parliament. But they will find little support for their demands for justice in such circles.

Over the past two months, every effort has been made to quell anger at de Menezes’ murder and defend the policies that made it possible.

Amidst demands from politicians and the media that Jean Charles’ killing not be “politicised,” people have been told to await the outcome of the IPCC investigation. This is not expected to report until December at the earliest, and there is little possibility that it will recommend criminal proceedings against the police officers involved, much less those in the upper echelons of the state and government who authorised the shoot-to-kill policy. IPCC Chairman Nick Hardwick has said he hoped the investigation would strengthen police support for the body.

In the meantime, the IPCC investigation has been used to silence discussion on de Menezes’ murder, whilst enabling the government to press ahead with further assaults on democratic rights.

The day before the family’s visit, leaked reports revealed that senior Scotland Yard commanders had raised the possibility that police had shot an innocent man within hours of de Menezes being killed. According to the *Mirror*, “Scotland Yard sources reportedly claimed officers became concerned as soon as they checked the identification in his wallet and told commanders of their doubts.”

Up to four leading officers had expressed their concerns when it became clear that de Menezes was not carrying a bomb or weapon, and that he had identity papers on him. This was before Sir Ian Blair’s public statement that de Menezes had been challenged and was shot after refusing to obey police orders. The same version of events was allowed to circulate for 24 hours, with Scotland Yard publicly linking de Menezes to terror groups.

When these facts came out, the IPCC chairman condemned the reports as “unhelpful.”

Whilst public criticism of police and government actions has been declared off-limits, shoot-to-kill remains in force. Appearing before the Commons all-party Home Affairs Select Committee inquiry into the July 7 London bombings earlier this month, Sir Ian Blair spelt out that Prime Minister Tony Blair and Home Secretary Charles Clarke, amongst others, had been privy to the decision to adopt a shoot-to-kill policy.

A spokesman for the prime minister stated that he could not remember being told about this *procedural* change.

Sir Ian Blair insisted that the policy not be altered, despite the death of an innocent man. The police had carried out a “fairly quick” review of policy following de Menezes’ shooting and had made “a small number of administrative changes, but the essential thrust of the tactics remains the same,” he said.

Rejecting that the police should be held accountable for their actions, Blair insisted they must be free to take “hard decisions.”

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