

Britain: Promotion for police commander involved in de Menezes shooting

Paul Mitchell
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Cressida Dick, the police commander in charge of the “shoot-to-kill” operation that led to the death of Jean Charles in London last year, has been recommended for promotion to deputy assistant commissioner, one of the highest ranks in the capital’s Metropolitan Police service.

De Menezes, an innocent young Brazilian, was shot seven times in the head on a tube train at Stockwell station on July 22, 2005 by an anti-terrorist squad investigating the failed explosions on London’s transport system the previous day.

His family reacted angrily to the appointment, saying officers involved in the shooting should be “prosecuted, not promoted.” Alex Pereira, a cousin of Jean Charles, said, “Cressida Dick should be facing criminal charges at the Old Bailey, not getting a big promotion at Scotland Yard.” He said the “people in charge” were working together to prevent justice being done and that if Jean Charles “was a rich person then it would have been a bit different.”

Another spokesman said the family were “absolutely disgusted and outraged at what is just one more slap in the face. We have not even seen the beginning let alone the end of the legal process as to who is culpable and responsible for the death of an innocent man. How can the Metropolitan Police Authority give the green light to promote Cressida Dick, someone who is centrally involved in the court case?”

MPA chairman Len Duvall said, “Clearly there are some sensitive and unprecedented circumstances involved. Candidates were chosen on the basis of their application and ability. The MPA would not prejudice an officer’s fair promotion prospects by making assumptions about future disciplinary action.”

Not only has the MPA recommended Dick’s appointment, but reports suggest the Metropolitan

Police Commissioner, Sir Ian Blair, who is himself embroiled in the controversy following the shooting, personally encouraged her to apply and sent in a glowing reference.

Dick’s promotion has been welcomed by Ken Livingstone, Labour’s Mayor of London. Giving a woman such a high-ranking position sent out “a powerful positive signal about the development of the Met as a modern police service,” he declared. Lee Jasper, Livingstone’s director of equalities and policing who made a name for himself in the 1990s in the campaigns against deaths of black people in police custody, said glowingly, “She is a firefly—small, diminutive and red-hot. She is not into flamboyant gestures but she is an exceptional officer and a tough cookie.”

The decision to promote Dick is highly political. It underscores the moves towards ever more authoritarian forms of rule. In elevating Dick, the police are sending out a clear message of their intention to ride roughshod over opposition to the draconian repressive measures brought in under the guise of the “war on terror.”

From the moment Jean Charles de Menezes was shot a campaign of lies and cover-up began, claiming that his cold-blooded execution was an unfortunate accident in an otherwise lawful and necessary policy.

In the hours following Jean Charles’ death, police sources claimed that he had been wearing a heavy overcoat (supposedly to conceal explosives) and had jumped over the station’s ticket barrier in an attempt to escape from the police. Originally it was reported he had been stopped outside the station and that he had been warned before being shot.

Ian Blair declared that Jean Charles was “directly linked to the ongoing and expanding anti-terrorist operation” hours after it was known that police had

killed an innocent man. Police later admitted that Jean Charles was wearing a denim jacket and had passed through the barrier normally without being stopped. In fact, he had not shown any suspicious behaviour whatsoever and had been unaware that he was being followed by plainclothes officers.

Blair then tried to deny the Independent Police Complaints Commission (IPCC) access to the crime scene for five days, even though national law requires an independent investigation.

On September 19, 2005, two months after the killing, the former Metropolitan Police Commissioner, Lord Stevens, revealed that Prime Minister Tony Blair and former Home Secretary David Blunkett knew about the “shoot to kill” policy three years earlier. The new policy, known as Operation Kratos, was brought in secretly without any public debate.

On January 19, 2006, the IPCC submitted a report of its investigation into 15 police officers to the Crown Prosecution Service (CPS). The report is believed to say that Dick wanted de Menezes to be arrested, but her orders had become unclear and misinterpreted by officers who shot him instead. There is controversy over whether or not she issued a key codeword that allowed for a shooting to proceed. However, it is impossible to confirm the truth because the IPCC has refused to release the report publicly or even let the de Menezes family or their lawyers have a copy.

The IPCC also carried out a second investigation, still ongoing, after a complaint from the de Menezes family about statements made by the police. And this investigation was started only after a leak revealed that there were conflicts between police statements, particularly those of Blair and the IPCC.

On July 17, 2006, the CPS announced it was not going to prosecute any police officer involved in the shooting, claiming “there was insufficient evidence to provide a realistic prospect of conviction.” It was impossible, the CPS said, to find out whether or not police officers thought Jean Charles was a suicide bomber or whether a log book recording the events had been falsified and by whom.

Instead the CPS announced that it intended to prosecute the office of the Metropolitan Police Commissioner under the Health and Safety at Work Act 1974 for failing to provide for the health, safety and welfare of non-employees.

Commissioner Blair has condemned charges in the case as “inappropriate” and the MPA has asked the CPS to reconsider the prosecution, doubting it was “in the public interest” to continue.

Shortly before the announcement of Dick’s promotion, the CPS “advised” the Southwark coroner John Sampson to adjourn his inquest into the de Menezes death, saying it could prejudice the health and safety trial. An inquest is one of the few ways the law allows the family to participate as next-of-kin to the deceased in an investigation, including access to witness statements and the right to question them. The family’s lawyers opposed an adjournment, saying the prosecution and inquest were two entirely separate legal proceedings and that it was unprecedented for an inquest to be delayed in this way. However, Sampson ignored the objections and ordered an adjournment.

As a result the inquest is likely to be delayed until at least 2008 and it could be years before it sees the light of day. A spokesperson for the de Menezes family said, “It is appalling that a year after Jean’s killing there has been no public investigation of the circumstances in which he came to die. It only serves to fuel suspicion that the authorities do not want the issues that arose out of Jean’s death to come into the public domain.”

The determination to prevent any investigation into how Britain’s home-grown death squad was created and how it operates has deep social and political roots. The Blair government defends the interests of a financial elite seeking to enrich itself through colonial plunder and the destruction of the living standards of the working class. This is the essential reason it has resorted to lawlessness and criminality.



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