

Guardian claims report clears London police chief of lying about De Menezes shooting

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The *Guardian* claims an official report has cleared London's police chief of lying about the shooting of Jean Charles de Menezes on July 22, 2005. The innocent Brazilian was killed at Stockwell tube station by plainclothes antiterrorist police following failed explosions on London's transport system the previous day.

The report, known as "Stockwell II," covers an investigation by the Independent Police Complaints Commission (IPCC) into claims by Metropolitan Police Service commissioner Sir Ian Blair that he did not know that Jean Charles was innocent until the following day.

Blair has continued to insist that for 24 hours after the shooting, he and his advisors believed the victim was a suicide bomber.

According to the *Guardian*, the still-secret report has not found any evidence to support allegations that the commissioner knew Jean Charles was innocent long before he admitted it. But it claims the report will strongly criticise the police force and say that it is "incomprehensible" why it took police officers at Scotland Yard 24 hours to tell Blair that the wrong man had been shot.

The *Guardian* says that the IPCC has sent more than 21 letters to police officers and officials, warning them that they "face criticism" or that other witnesses contradict their version of events. A particularly "tough" letter is said to have been sent to Britain's top antiterrorist officer, Andy Hayman, who appeared with Commissioner Blair at a press conference after the shooting. It says his statements to journalists that a terrorist had been shot was at odds with what he was saying at the "Gold Command" emergency meetings held at Scotland Yard following the shooting.

An IPCC spokeswoman told this reporter that the *Guardian* could not be quoting directly from the report because its publication has been delayed until the autumn.

She suggested the source of the story could be one of the people who had received the "Salmon" warning letters. When asked if it was Blair himself, she answered, "in theory, you wouldn't expect him to."

The *Guardian* article raises more questions than it answers. If indeed it is "incomprehensible" that Blair's subordinates refused to tell him that Jean Charles was innocent and concocted a web of deceit and cover-up in the midst of a "war on terror," something more than them "facing criticism" would be required. Such an extraordinary failure would necessitate sackings, leading from those immediately involved in the operation to the highest levels of command—even if this stopped outside the doors of Blair's office.

Nothing of the sort will happen. The Crown Prosecution Service decided in July 2006, following the Stockwell I inquiry into the shooting, not to prosecute any of the officers directly involved or their commanders, on the spurious basis that there was "insufficient evidence to provide a realistic prospect of conviction." To add insult to injury, a prosecution was started against the Metropolitan Police under the Health and Safety at Work Act for "failing to provide for the health, safety and welfare" of Jean Charles. The trial is scheduled to start in the autumn.

If any disciplinary action were to be brought against the officers as a result of the Stockwell II investigation, the decision rests with the Metropolitan Police Authority, which has already signalled its intention to continue the cover-up. The day after the *Guardian* ran its story, Len Duvall, head of the MPA and chairman of the Greater London Labour Party, confirmed the promotion to Deputy Assistant Commissioner, effective March 19, of Commander Cressida Dick. She was the head of Gold Command and the officer in direct charge of the Stockwell operation. Having considered the "unprecedented circumstances" surrounding the

appointment, Duvall said, “We are satisfied that our decision to confirm promotion is the right one to take at this time.”

“The MPA is keenly aware that the people of London must have confidence in the police who work, in what are often difficult circumstances, to protect them,” Duvall added.

The IPCC only carried out the Stockwell II inquiry into Sir Ian Blair’s conduct because of the persistence of the de Menezes family, who fought to expose the lies and slanders hurled at Jean Charles. Even then, the IPCC had tried to shield the commissioner, choosing not to interview him personally and ending its initial investigations with Cressida Dick. And it meekly submitted to Blair’s ban on IPCC investigators entering the scene of the crime, which he enforced for five days following the shooting.

Harriet Wistrich, a solicitor for the family, said that what Blair knew and when was a “key point” of the investigation. “He made statements on the Friday afternoon and later which were misleading. Was he telling the truth? Did the Met give out misleading information to make things look less bad for themselves?”

That Friday afternoon, just after 3:30 p.m., Blair held a press conference at which he declared that Jean Charles “was challenged and refused to obey” police instructions. His words gave the green light to the media to launch a lurid disinformation campaign against the young Brazilian worker. It was claimed that Jean Charles had left the block of flats that were home to a suspected terrorist wearing a bulky overcoat (assumed by police to disguise a bomb) even though it was a hot day. Police were supposed to have challenged him outside the station but he attempted to flee, jumped a ticket barrier, before being overpowered and shot several times in the head. Several reports quoted bystanders who claimed to have seen these events with their own eyes.

It soon emerged that on every important detail, the public was told a pack of lies. At no point was Jean Charles challenged by the police, all of whom were in plain clothes, thus flatly contradicting Blair’s statement. Jean Charles entered the station wearing jeans and a denim jacket, stopping to pick up a newspaper, paid his fare, walked through the barriers and descended the escalator slowly. He then ran across the platform to board the newly arrived train and sat down in one of the first available seats before he was dragged to the floor and shot.

A leak from the IPCC in early 2006 revealed that senior

police officers, who were inside Scotland Yard on July 22, said that on the day of the shooting all talk revolved around the assumption that an innocent man had been killed. Deputy Assistant Commissioner Brian Paddick, for instance, stated that a member of Sir Ian’s private office team believed the wrong man had been killed just six hours after the shooting—a claim Scotland Yard vehemently denies.

Of course, none of the events on July 22 are incomprehensible.

From the start, the Metropolitan Police were opposed to any investigation into the killing, which had revealed the existence of a shoot-to-kill policy known as “Operation Kratos” adopted in secret two years earlier in high-level discussions between top police officers and the government. “Operation Kratos” represented the apex of a vast body of legislation enacted by the government that has given the police the power to act as judge, jury and executioner on the basis of the so-called “war against terror.” The treatment meted out to de Menezes sent out the clear message—first articulated by Prime Minister Tony Blair—that the “rules of the game” had changed.

Behind the resort to new forms of rule based on lawlessness and criminality lies a social process. Opposed by the vast majority of the population, the Blair government is charged with defending the interests of a financial elite seeking to enrich itself through colonial plunder and the destruction of the living standards of the working class. The cover-up surrounding the shoot-to-kill operation in Stockwell is one more link in the chain of lies used by the Blair government to justify its predatory foreign policy and the accompanying erosion of fundamental democratic rights at home.



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