

Britain: Cousin of Jean Charles de Menezes—“We fear another cover-up”

Our correspondent
24 September 2008

Patricia da Silva Armani is the cousin of Jean Charles de Menezes. She spoke to the *World Socialist Web Site* on the eve of the coroner’s inquest convened into the innocent Brazilian’s brutal murder by a police gun squad.

On July 22, 2005, Jean Charles was shot to death on a tube train at Stockwell station by an anti-terrorist unit that was investigating the failed explosions on London’s transport system the previous day.

He had been covertly trailed by a police surveillance team as he left his home and made his way to work as an electrician. No attempt was made to detain him en route. At Stockwell station, some 26 minutes later, he was followed onto a train where, without warning, plainclothes, armed police officers grabbed Jean Charles, pinned him to the seat and pumped 11 bullets at point blank range into his body—7 directly into his head.

Even though it was quickly established that Jean Charles was innocent, police and government spokesmen and the media continued to claim that a suicide bomber had been shot. It subsequently transpired that claims that Jean Charles had behaved “suspiciously” and had sought to evade arrest—all used to justify the police’s decision to open fire—were lies.

Nonetheless, the Crown Prosecution Service (CPS) rejected any criminal proceedings against any of the officers directly involved in the shooting and those who commanded them, claiming that there was “insufficient evidence to provide a realistic prospect of conviction.” Instead, last November, the police were found guilty under the Health and Safety at Work Act 1974 of “failing to provide for the health, safety and welfare” of Jean Charles.

This was despite the fact that the only justification for targeting Jean Charles was that he lived in the same block of apartments as someone under surveillance and had “Mongolian eyes” and the campaign of misinformation by the police in the hours following the shooting.

The coroner’s inquest is to be a purely “fact-finding” investigation, with the coroner, Sir Michael Wright, having told the jury that it is not a trial and is not supposed to apportion blame. The de Menezes family is, however, seeking a verdict of unlawful killing in order to pressure the CPS into prosecuting police officers involved in the killing.

WSWS: What are your memories of Jean Charles? What was

he like?

Patricia: I remember Jean Charles as my best friend. He was very good with the family a hard-working man. He was my first cousin. My uncle, his father, was the brother of my Mum. We lived in different parts of the country. I lived in Sao Pao and he lived in Gonzaga. But every year, my family went to Gonzaga on holidays, and we always met on different family occasions. We were very close.

WSWS: What made him come to England?

Patricia: For a better life. And to send money back to my aunt and my uncle back home.

WSWS: How did you first hear about the shooting?

Patricia: We were told that Jean Charles had been arrested. I was at work at that time.

He was an electrician, working in a building. At night, he worked washing up in a restaurant. I was a cleaner. I finished work and went back to my house. I met another cousin, who was very upset. She looked desperate.

She said, “Patricia, you have to calm down, because Jean Charles has been arrested.” I said, “Why? He hasn’t done anything.” They told me he had been accused of being a terrorist. I said, “What? That is not possible.” And I called Alex, another cousin, who was at the police station in Brixton. And he told me, “You should sit down because it is bad news, I think Jean Charles is dead. You should come to the police station.” I said, “You are lying, he cannot be dead.”

When I got to the police station, other cousins were there. I said, “Alex, what is happening?” And he said, “They do not assist us, they don’t help. They told us to go to hell.” So I said, “Well, now we are here, we are helping. So why won’t they talk to us?”

WSWS: How long was it between when Jean Charles was shot and when you were told about it?

Patricia: 27 hours. He was shot in the morning on Friday, and all day the press were saying the police have killed a terrorist. And I thought, oh, they have shot a terrorist! OK? And when we were told Jean Charles had been arrested, we didn’t connect it because the shooting had happened one day before. Terrible!

That day Jean Charles had not come home, but I thought he had gone out, to the bar, to a party, with his girlfriend.... I went to work the following day, and when I got back, my cousins

were in my home to tell me that he had been arrested. I did not connect it, because they had been telling lies, lies, all the time.

WSWS: What did you think when the police came out with all these lies about him running, wearing a thick black jacket, and having jumped over the ticket machines? This after telling you he had been shot. What were you thinking at the time?

Patricia: I knew it was all lies, because I knew Jean Charles. He had been here four years, and many times he had been stopped by the police, many times. And he had no black jacket, no black jacket. And I was thinking, it is a lie, it is a lie.

WSWS: Do you believe that you are going to get justice?

Patricia: I hope that at this enquiry we will get the answer to our questions. How was it that Jean Charles was allowed to go all the way to Stockwell Station? The journey from the flat to Stockwell Station is a long way. Why didn't the police stop him before? Why did the police let him get on the bus if they thought he was a terrorist? Why did the police let him inside the Metro? If they thought he had bomb, why did they let him carry on his journey? Did they know he was not a terrorist? This is my question, why?

We want to know the truth, why was he killed in that way.

WSWS: Do you think this will come out of the inquest?

Patricia: Maybe. I hope, but we fear another cover-up. We fear the inquest will not show the truth. But I am hoping, do you understand? I am hoping.

WSWS: The Independent Police Complaints Commission report that has come out has exonerated the police. They let the police go. They say they've done their job. In no case of a shooting of innocent people has any policeman ever been charged. The Crown Prosecution Service was also a cover-up. The only thing the police have been charged with is breaching Health and Safety regulations. Do you think the inquest is going to change that?

Patricia: Yes, yes, I know. It is all a cover-up. I think nothing happens in these cases because.... This fine on the police...this doesn't work, the police have to pay to the state, but the state is the police and the police are the state.

WSWS: Do you think that the killing of Jean Charles was part of a broader attack on democratic rights? What do you think of the role of the police today?

Patricia: I think it will be bad if they don't punish the police, because if they don't punish them it could happen again.

WSWS: Do you think that the rights of people in this country are under attack?

Patricia: Yes, I believe that the human rights, socialist rights and democratic rights of people in this country are being undermined, are under attack. That's wrong, because it is not their fault but the fault of people with power.

WSWS: The inquest is going to be a long one, but the police have been granted anonymity. They will be behind a screen in one part of the Oval cricket ground, giving evidence, and the family and everybody else will be at the other side. So how do you think truth will prevail?

Patricia: This is what worries us, scares us, that it is starting with this anonymity. We, the family can see their faces. But we will not know their names or anything about them. And the public, which for me is the most important thing, won't even be able to see their faces.

WSWS: This shows it is political, not just mistakes by individuals, but the whole state defending its own. You are confronting not individual policemen, but the state apparatus defending its right to kill.

Patricia: I agree with what you say, because if the public cannot see even the faces of the officers, they can carry on. They will do it, because we know that the police's shoot-to-kill policy is continuing. This policy gives them the right to kill, me, or you.

WSWS: How do we stop that from happening again?

Patricia: The public must know the truth, the public must understand what happened. If there is no punishment, then it will happen again. I don't think arresting them is the solution. They are not competent to do the work as a police force. I don't ask for much. I don't agree with those who say, oh you have to arrest, you have to kill, you have to do this or that. No, no, no, those policemen must be expelled from the police force because they have not the competence to do their job.

WSWS: Do you think that those who would replace them will not do the same if ordered to? The policy of shoot-to-kill is determined by individuals.

Patricia: This has to end. They need more training, better training. But I don't think that the policy of shoot-to-kill will finish just by training. I think that the day the United States stops thinking that they have to own the world, to stop invading other peoples, I think many things will get better. And yes, Britain, too.

WSWS: When are the rest of the family coming over?

Patricia: My aunt and cousin, Jean Charles's mother and brother, are coming on October 4. They will not be here for the opening of the inquest. Myself, my cousin Alexandro and other members of the family will be there. We would like you to come, but I don't know if it is possible because there is only room for 150 people, I am not sure if this includes all the press. But the proceedings will be reported on a web site.

WSWS: This is very conscious and deliberate.

Patricia: Yes. When I heard the inquest was going to be held at the Oval, I thought great, great. The public, lots of people will be able to assist and see what happens. And then I was told, no, they are not opening up the Oval, just a small room. They want to control everything.



To contact the WSWS and the Socialist Equality Party visit:

wsws.org/contact