

Police Complaints Commission lied about police shooting that sparked British riots

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The Independent Police Complaints Commission (IPCC) has admitted it “may have inadvertently given misleading information” about the circumstances surrounding the fatal police shooting of 29-year-old Mark Duggan in Tottenham, north London.

Its statement, released late on Friday, acknowledged: “Analysis of media coverage and queries raised on Twitter have alerted to us to the possibility that we may have inadvertently given misleading information to journalists when responding to very early media queries following the shooting of Mark Duggan by MPS officers on the evening of 4th August.”

The IPCC admission is damning. Its deceptive statements helped spark the social unrest that has been met with a wave of state repression against working-class youth.

Anger and disbelief over the official explanation of Duggan’s shooting by a CO19 Special Firearms Unit prompted a peaceful protest to demand answers by the young man’s family and friends outside Tottenham police station on Saturday August 6.

No such answers were forthcoming. Instead, the protest was attacked by police, triggering an eruption of anger over police brutality and social deprivation that swept through working-class areas of the capital and spread to other cities and towns in England.

The IPCC’s statement makes clear that the outrage over the official version of the killing of Duggan was entirely justified.

Moreover, the IPCC, after giving “misleading information” in response to early enquiries, remained silent for days, enabling the media, politicians and police to broadcast the false story, which it authored, that Duggan had opened fire first.

As the riots spread, the IPCC continued to play down the fact that the bullet supposedly fired by Duggan, which struck a police radio, was police issue. The IPCC told Duggan’s fiancée, Symone Wilson, the mother of three of his four children, that it could not confirm if this was the case.

On August 9, Wilson said, “As soon as this came out in

the news [that the bullet was police issue], the IPCC called me and said it had not been confirmed. But if it is true...we will be suing them because they effectively executed him.”

It was not until the following day, when the disturbances had spread to Birmingham, Manchester and Bristol that the IPCC admitted ballistic tests proved Duggan did not open fire. The father of four had been shot twice by the police. The bullet lodged in the police radio, it now appears, had passed through Duggan’s arm. Another struck him in the chest.

There is no evidence to suggest that Duggan ever presented a threat. Eyewitness reports state that he was killed as he surrendered.

Reacting to the IPCC statement, Symone Wilson, speaking at a commemoration of Duggan’s life on the weekend, said, “We put our faith in the IPCC but they have let us down. How can we now trust that they are independent of the police as they say they are?”

Her sister, Michelle, said, “The IPCC person told us one thing behind closed doors, once she eventually spoke with us days after the shooting, and then said something completely different in public. We have been treated appallingly by the IPCC.”

The IPCC has not accounted for the lies told by its representatives, but there can be only one explanation: it was continuing in its longstanding role of shielding the police from criticism, much less accountability, for their murderous actions.

Duggan was only the latest of hundreds of people who have been killed while in police custody over the last decade. Not a single police officer has been convicted in connection with these deaths.

The campaign group Inquest found that between 1997 and 2007 there were over 530 deaths in police custody in England and Wales. Inquest stated: “These were as a result of police shootings or following contact with the police, and more than 320 deaths in police vehicle incidents.” From 1990 to 2011, police shot dead 53 people, 21 of the killings having been committed by the Metropolitan Police.

Amongst these police fatalities was the innocent 27-year-old Brazilian worker Jean Charles de Menezes in July 2005. De Menezes had just boarded a train at Stockwell Tube station in London when he was confronted by armed plainclothes officers, also members of CO19, two of whom fired 11 shots. Eight of these hit de Menezes, seven in his head.

This brutal execution—part of an anti-terror operation—was similarly accompanied by a wave of disinformation.

Immediately afterwards, the Metropolitan Police stated that the shooting was “directly linked” to the investigation of the attempted bombings in London the previous day. This was the start of a concerted campaign of disinformation by the police, suggesting that de Menezes was wearing a “suspicious-looking overcoat” on a hot day and had tried to flee after he was challenged by police. These claims, and many more, were proven to be lies.

Throughout these events, the IPCC played the lead role in disseminating police propaganda. It maintained the official police line that then-Metropolitan Police Commissioner Sir Ian Blair did not know anything about the victim’s real identity until the next morning. This was despite its own subsequent investigation, which concluded that less than five hours after de Menezes was shot leading Metropolitan police officers had “strong suspicions” that an innocent man had been killed.

The IPCC’s first inquiry cleared the police officers involved of responsibility for Jean Charles’ death. The results of a second investigation by the IPCC, prompted by complaints from his family over the false claims circulated in the wake of his murder, were altered following threats of legal action by the officers criticised.

Similarly, the IPCC worked closely with the police in the aftermath of the killing of newspaper vendor Ian Tomlinson, who collapsed and died April 1 2009, minutes after two unprovoked assaults by the Metropolitan Police’s Territorial Support Group during G-20 summit protests in London.

When, after several days, the *Guardian* broadcast a video clip showing a police officer violently attacking Tomlinson, the IPCC and a senior police officer visited the newspaper’s offices. The newspaper reported that the IPCC demanded the video be removed from public view, claiming it would “jeopardise” the enquiry.

The IPCC’s latest statement has been reported without comment in the media. There have been no demands for the body to identify those who falsely briefed the media and to hold them to account.

The silence on the IPCC’s admission is deliberate. The lies and disinformation surrounding Duggan’s death are central to the propaganda justifying police repression across working-class neighbourhoods.

Only last Thursday, Prime Minister David Cameron stood before an emergency recalled parliament to insist that the riots were in no way connected to Duggan’s shooting. Rather, his killing was “used as an excuse by opportunist thugs in gangs” to carry out “criminality,” Cameron declared.

Cameron’s claims were reiterated by Labour leader Ed Miliband and representatives from all the major parties. The only issue was “criminality” and “immorality,” they agreed in unison, as they sanctioned mass police repression.

As of Sunday morning, more than 2,300 people had been arrested nationally, with over 1,400 of these in London. In the West Midlands police have arrested more than 500 and in Greater Manchester more than 230.

Acting Metropolitan Police Commissioner Tim Godwin said that up to 3,000 people could be arrested and brought to trial in London. It has set up Operation Withern, involving 500 officers who are reviewing some 20,000 hours of CCTV footage in preparation for more arrests.

Nationally, more than 1,000 people, including children as young as 11, have been brought before kangaroo courts that are open for 24 hours, including on Sunday.

The harshest possible sentences are being dished out with the barest hint of due process. One mother of two, who was not involved in any of the disturbances in Manchester, received a five month jail sentence for wearing a pair of shorts her housemate was accused of stealing from a shop.

The Conservative/Liberal Democrat government is preparing further clampdowns, including the blanket censorship of social media such as Twitter and Facebook, as well as Blackberry Messenger. It has also demanded that broadcasters including the BBC and Sky News hand to the police all unused footage of the riots.



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