

Police victimise London protest against deaths in custody

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Saturday saw the 13th annual United Families and Friends Campaign (UFFC) march in protest at deaths in police custody and in secure psychiatric hospitals. The list of deaths in custody gets longer, and now stands at more than 3,100. The police killing of Mark Duggan, a 29-year-old father of four in Tottenham, which triggered August's riots, brought many to the demonstration.

Since this past summer's riots, there has been a marked escalation in police and state repression. This found expression on Saturday in a heightened police response to the protest, with police cordons thrown around the demonstration. Relatives of those killed by police were dragged away and arrested.

Around 300 people, mostly friends and relatives of those killed by the police, marched silently down Whitehall before handing in a letter to Prime Minister David Cameron. There were appeals for justice from the relatives of several victims of police violence, including the innocent Brazilian worker, Jean Charles de Menezes, gunned down on the London subway in July 2005, and Duggan.

The protest was beginning to disperse, when several protestors sat down in the road. The police cordons moved in to encircle and isolate protestors. Several were dragged away, with protesters complaining at the arbitrary application of physical force. Video footage of the policing can be seen at:

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=SO9y68iRJok>

Individuals removed by police are seen being prevented from returning to the demonstration. The footage clearly shows journalists being prevented from documenting events. Other mobile telephone footage available online shows police intervening to stop a

legal observer from discussing with a handcuffed man.

The UFFC demands justice for those affected by police violence, noting that no police officer has ever stood trial for the murder of an innocent civilian. Statistics compiled by the charity Inquest record 1,416 deaths in custody since 1990 alone. Of these, 53 were the victims of police shooting.

The UFFC calls for the genuinely independent investigation of deaths in police custody, rather than the current whitewash affairs conducted by the Independent Police Complaints Commission. It calls for the suspension of officers involved in custody deaths until an investigation is completed, and demands that prosecution automatically follow "unlawful killing" verdicts at inquests. It insists that officers responsible for deaths should face criminal charges even after their retirement from the police, and calls for Legal Aid to be made available to the relatives of victims.

These demands clash with the assault on democratic rights conducted by the Conservative/Liberal Democrat coalition government. Extensive cuts to Legal Aid have already been announced, while August's riots were followed by an extension of punitive sentencing powers. The tragic outcome for the families of those killed by police officers is that the individual legal cases run their course without any justice being served to the victims.

World Socialist Web Site reporters spoke on Saturday to Patricia da Silva Armani, the cousin of Jean Charles de Menezes. (For a previous interview, see "Britain: Cousin of Jean Charles de Menezes—'We fear another cover-up'".) She said the family's current appeal to the European Court of Human Rights is probably their last chance to secure justice against the officers who murdered her cousin. On the basis of their experiences to date, she is not optimistic, although the family will

continue to explore every legal avenue.

Banners and t-shirts on the protest listed the names of those who have died. Mark Duggan was the most recent, but the growing list is extensive: The singer Smiley Culture, Mikey Powell, Jason McPherson, Azelle Rodney, Harry Stanley, Roger Sylvester, Kingsley Burrell, Habib Ullah, Sean Rigg, Ricky Bishop, Paul Coker, Ian Tomlinson, Demetre Fraser, Brian Douglas and Sarah Campbell were just some of those named.

Particularly poignant were the t-shirts commemorating Cynthia Jarrett. On October 5, 1985, her son Floyd was arrested. Four officers went to search his home on the Broadwater Farm estate in Tottenham, which was also home to Mark Duggan.

The police let themselves into the flat with Floyd's keys while 49-year-old Cynthia was watching television. Pushed by an officer, she collapsed and died of heart failure. Her death came one week after Cherry Groce had been shot by police in south London in a similar raid. Protests at Broadwater Farm police station erupted into riots when the estate was put on lock-down and surrounded by riot police.

Patrick Jarrett, one of Cynthia's sons, was at Saturday's protest. He had come, he said, in response to the killing of Mark Duggan, but "nothing's changed" since the death of his mother. If anything, he said, the situation has worsened. He called for the charging of officers responsible for deaths in custody, saying, "All we can do is demonstrate."

During the 1985 riots, a police officer, Keith Blakelock, was killed. The police arrested Winston Silcott, Mark Braithwaite and Engin Raghup, who were convicted at a frame-up trial in 1987. The convictions were subsequently quashed on appeal after forensic tests proved their confessions had been fabricated.

Stadius Alfonso Christian, who spoke to the WSWS, confirmed the frame-up character of the police investigation into the Blakelock killing. He had been in prison at the time of the officer's death, but said police had come looking for him in connection with it. Like Patrick Jarrett, he had come on the demonstration in response to the Duggan shooting, but he also drew a direct connection with the earlier events.

Participants in the demonstration pointed to the connection between police brutality and social conditions. Jarrett pointed to how working class youth

are written off very early on, in their school years. "They exclude a child [from school] in Tottenham, that's it. They exclude a child in [more affluent] St John's Wood, they find another school."



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