

Inquest into police killing of Mark Duggan sabotaged

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A public inquest into the killing of Mark Duggan by Metropolitan police officers from the CO19 firearms unit is in doubt after the extraordinary intervention of the Independent Police Complaints Authority IPCC).

The IPCC is meant to investigate police complaints and police conduct and has a long record of wilful failure to prosecute abuses. But even by the IPCC's own standards, its latest actions are extraordinary.

Mark Duggan, a 29-year-old father of four, was unarmed when he was killed by a bullet to the chest after the taxi he was travelling in was stopped by armed police in Tottenham, north London, on August 4. His killing was the spark for major civil disturbances across England.

At a pre-inquest review at North London coroners court, the IPCC, represented by QC Mark Ley-Morgan, said evidence about police decision-making on the day was too sensitive to be disclosed at a public inquest.

On March 26, the IPCC issued a statement:

“The Coroner was advised that a related criminal trial is likely to run into October this year and, as the result of representations made by the Crown Prosecution Service, evidence relevant to the criminal trial that is also relevant to the inquest, will not be provided to all interested persons to the inquest until that trial has concluded.”

After alerting the coroner, the IPCC said that it was “in possession of material that would be relevant to the issue of police decision-making but which could not be provided to the inquest for legal reasons.”

Coroner Andrew Walker explained to Duggan's family that the likely outcome of the IPCC's actions was that it “raises likelihood and I want the family to understand that that may mean that an inquest cannot proceed.”

A further pre-inquest is scheduled for October 23,

where it will be decided whether or not a full eight-week public inquiry will be held on the provisional date of January 28, 2013, already delayed from October 15. The convening of a closed inquest is now being aired.

Duggan's fiancée, Semone Wilson, his brother Marlon, and his aunt Carole attended the pre-inquest hearing. Responding to the extraordinary turn of events, they stated, “We believe the IPCC are withholding information from us, which is delay tactics. Maybe they think we will go away, come to terms with what has happened, but we are a grieving family and we will always grieve for Mark.”

On BBC Radio Four, Carole Duggan explained that Mark was “executed” by the police and that all the information related to this is “being withheld from us.... I know that the IPCC have got a job to do, but we see the IPCC as an obstacle in the way of getting information from the Metropolitan Police.”

On August 6, family and friends organised a peaceful protest march to the local police station to demand answers. Instead of finding answers, the protest was attacked by the police. The situation escalated rapidly, as pent-up hostility to police killings and intimidation, the hated stop-and-search powers used to intimidate working class youth, combined with poverty and unemployment, erupted into confrontations with the police and rioting all over London.

After the killing of Duggan, the local police did not see fit to even inform the family of his death. During an earlier preview inquest, lawyer Mike Mansfield said the Duggan family had not been told of the bullet's trajectory or given an interim pathologist's report. In his experience, he had never come across a situation where a family had not received the pathology report within a month of the death of a family member.

Duggan's mother Pam said, “They let things really

drag on. Because of all the confusion and misinformation I kept hoping that my son was still alive. That made things so much worse for all of us.”

Both police and the IPCC had initially described the killing of Duggan as an act of self-defence against an armed and dangerous criminal who started a shoot-out—evidenced by a bullet lodged in an officer’s radio. These claims fed a baying right-wing media frenzy aimed at justifying violent state repression in the disturbances following Duggan’s killing.

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The IPCC and the Metropolitan Police were forced to issue a retraction of these statements, admitting they could have misled the press. In other words, they organised a cover-up, apologising to the family only after their story had begun to unravel.

According to media reports, the initial IPCC investigation uncovered that police had followed Duggan in a pre-planned operation all the way from Hackney, as the taxi entered Tottenham. The surveillance team called in CO19 armed unit marksmen. They halted the taxi, ordered Duggan to leave the vehicle and shot him.

No gun was found on his person. Police said they found a weapon over a fence, up to 14 feet away. According to the family lawyer, witnesses said they saw police throw the gun over the fence. Neither the gun, nor the sock it was said to be inside, had any trace of Duggan’s DNA or fingerprints. Two types of blood were found on the gun, but neither were Duggan’s.

Most significantly, the gun had not been fired. It also emerged that the bullet lodged in the police officer’s radio was from the same CO19 officer’s MP5 carbine that shot Duggan.

After the pre-inquest, the IPCC issued a statement saying its hands have been tied by the Regulation of Investigatory Powers Act 2000, passed by the last Labour government. It said that “not only can some information not be disclosed, we cannot even explain why we cannot disclose the information, as this itself would be a breach of the law.”

After the IPCC decision, the Metropolitan Police went on the offensive. In a letter to the *Evening Standard* and the *Daily Mail*, Deputy Assistant Commissioner Mark Simmons of Territorial Policing wrote that their headlines—”Police block inquest into

Duggan’s death” and “Outrage as police seek secrecy at riot inquest”—were “misleading” and “extremely damaging”, while reiterating that for legal reasons the IPCC are likely to be in “possession of material that could not be provided to the Coroner.”

Simmons thanked a compliant press for “promptly” changing their “headlines online.”



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