

Killing of two female officers used to demand greater UK police powers

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The killing of two female police officers in Manchester, England has occasioned a frenzied government, police and media-led campaign aimed at handing the police even greater powers.

Dale Cregan has been charged with murder.

There has been saturation TV coverage of the deaths and their aftermath, accompanied by calls, led by the Police Federation, for more police to be armed.

Prime Minister David Cameron said the deaths were “a shocking reminder of the debt we owe to those who put themselves in danger to keep us safe and secure.”

The Bishop of Shrewsbury, Reverend Mark Davies, said the police were “the last line of defence between us and savagery.”

Two days after the killings, the BBC pulled an episode of its show, “Good Cop”, with the justification that it featured a violent attack on a female police officer.

The following day, police entered a high school classroom in Hattersley, Manchester and arrested a 15-year-old boy in front of his school friends. Held on suspicion of assisting Cregan, he was detained in his school uniform at Greater Manchester Police headquarters for six hours before being released on bail.

Cregan’s initial court appearance saw a whole section of Manchester city centre sealed off, as dozens of heavily armed police officers swamped the area. At least 20 officers armed with sub-machineguns surrounded the court, with others on the roofs of adjacent offices. In the well of the court, two police officers dressed in military-style fatigues carried rifles. As Cregan stood in the dock for a two-minute appearance, he was surrounded by five heavily armed officers.

A media campaign, led by Rupert Murdoch’s *Sun*

tabloid, demanded the sacking of Conservative Party Chief Whip Andrew Mitchell who was accused of verbally abusing a police officer outside Downing Street. The altercation occurred on the evening after the deaths of the Tameside police. Police accounts leaked to the *Sun* stated that, after Mitchell was prevented from cycling through the main gates of Downing Street, he told the officer, “Best you learn your f***ing place... You don’t run this f***ing government... You’re f***ing plebs.”

John Tully, chairman of the Metropolitan Police Federation, called on Mitchell to resign as chief whip and said a “full and frank inquiry” was required. He was supported Labour Party leader Ed Miliband, while Labour MP Bill Esterson said the issue was whether “a Government minister can get away with questioning the integrity of the police.”

Mitchell denied saying the words attributed to him, but was nonetheless forced to make a series of public apologies.

This extraordinary and unprecedented campaign unfolds under conditions in which police and sections of the establishment are up in arms at the coalition government’s argument that in order for its austerity measures to appear “fair” they should be applied across the board—including the police. The campaign has succeeded in making such demands for cuts to the police service highly problematic.

Just as importantly, it occurs as a number of incidents have revealed the extent of the lawlessness of the police. What is being whipped up following the Tameside deaths is an atmosphere in which this too can be swept under the carpet as questioning the “integrity” of the force.

Last week a senior Metropolitan Police detective was charged with offering information to Murdoch’s now

defunct *News of the World*. The newspaper was closed in July last year after evidence of widespread criminality, including the bribery and corruption of police officers.

April Casburn, a detective chief inspector in specialist operations, is accused of offering to give the newspaper information in September 2010. He is a former head of the National Terrorist Financial Investigation Unit.

The charges came just days after the truth was finally revealed about the April 15, 1989 Hillsborough football stadium disaster, after a vast 23 year cover-up involving successive governments, the South Yorkshire Police and other authorities. Even as the disaster, which killed 96 people, was underway, the police spread lies claiming that it had been caused by Liverpool Football Club supporters. Senior police officers colluded with a right-wing Conservative Party MP and their lies were again disseminated by the *Sun*. To this day no police officer has ever been prosecuted for actions that led to the deaths of the supporters.

The fact is the number of civilians killed by the police dwarfs that of police killed by civilians. Again recent events testify to a police force that operates with impunity.

On September 17 former Territorial Support Group (TSG) officer Simon Harwood was sacked for “misconduct” during the G20 summit protest in London on April 1, 2009. He had viciously attacked 47-year-old newspaper vendor Ian Tomlinson on three separate occasions. Tomlinson died minutes after Harwood attacked him from behind with a baton and then violently pushed him to the ground.

Despite an inquest verdict, held in May 2011 that the 47-year-old father of nine was unlawfully killed, Harwood has been allowed to leave the Metropolitan Police without punishment on a full pension.

A public inquiry into the April 2005 police shooting of 24-year-old Azelle Rodney is currently taking place in London. Rodney was shot six times by an armed officer just three months before Brazilian worker Jean Charles de Menezes was murdered by police on a London Underground train.

Yet another police killing, that of unarmed father of four Mark Duggan, on August 4 last year in Tottenham, north London, was the spark for riots involving thousands of youth that erupted in London and major cities nationally.

Earlier this year police in Greater Manchester shot dead a 35-year-old man, Anthony Grainger, in a car park. Police claimed they had evidence that Grainger and three other men, including two who were also in the car, were preparing to commit robbery. On September 22 a jury cleared the three men of the charge.

These are just some of the 333 people who have died at the hands of the police, or in or following police custody, over the past 11 years, according to figures compiled by the Independent Police Complaints Commission. Not a single police officer has ever been successfully prosecuted for any of these fatalities.

In a separate survey, however, the Inquest charity found that a much higher figure, 1,433 people in England and Wales, have died either in police custody or following other police contact since 1990. Most of these deaths, 950, took place in custody, and 54 were police shootings. In 2003 alone, 104 deaths were recorded.

In contrast, just 256 police officers have been shot and killed in the UK in the nearly seven decades since 1945.

While the government has not at this stage endorsed calls for the arming of all police officers, a calculation involved in this response is that thousands of police officers are already routinely armed. Government figures show the number of authorised firearms officers in England and Wales stood at 6,653 in 2010/11. The number of incidents in which the use of armed police was authorised was 17,209. The number of incidents involving Armed Response Vehicles, crewed by firearms specialists and on permanent patrol in many urban areas, totalled 13,346 in the same period.

Police forces employed lethal and potentially fatal taser guns in almost 4,500 incidents last year, a 40 percent increase on 2010. A Freedom of Information request found that tasers were fired by officers across England and Wales at least 1,081 times last year, an average of almost three occasions every day.



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