

UK: Commander in charge of police killing of Jean Charles de Menezes given top job

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Conservative Home Secretary Amber Rudd and Labour Mayor of London Sadiq Khan have appointed Cressida Dick as the next Commissioner of the Metropolitan Police—the organisation responsible for law enforcement in the UK’s capital and for counter-terrorism operations across the country.

Dick replaces Sir Bernard Hogan-Howe, who retired after five-and-a-half years in the post.

The appointment of Dick to the most senior position in the UK’s leading police force has been hailed by the media and top politicians as a breakthrough for modern British policing. Khan declared Dick’s appointment as “a historic day for London,” adding, “She has already had a long and distinguished career, and her experience and ability has shone throughout this process.”

Much has been made of Dick’s status as the first woman to head the Metropolitan Police. In an editorial, the *Guardian* praised in glowing terms the “landmark” represented by having “a (highly competent) woman at the helm of an organisation which remains, with its notorious ‘canteen culture’, still a boys’ club in so many ways.”

In an op-ed piece in the newspaper, Martin Kettle proclaimed Dick’s nomination “an advance for equality” and “the most dramatic evidence so far of a transformational change in the sociology and direction of British policing.” Applauding the fact that alongside Dick, the head of the National Police Chiefs Council, the head of the National Crime Agency, the Home Secretary and the Prime Minister are all women—the article would have the reader believe that propelling more women into senior police and government positions is all that is needed to transform the state into a socially progressive force.

The *Guardian*’s articles are a reactionary attempt to present the election of a woman to the top job as a further advance in the Met’s generally progressive trajectory

over the last decades. They use identity politics to recast the Metropolitan police in progressive and civilising colours in order to conceal the increasing use of repressive measures and escalating militarisation of the police force.

The appointment of Dick could not be further from being “progressive.” This is the police officer who has the blood of an innocent man—Jean Charles de Menezes—on her hands, a fact that was treated as an inconvenient, but unimportant, side detail in the *Guardian*’s effusive commentary.

Jean Charles de Menezes, a young Brazilian electrician, was shot dead on July 22, 2005 at Stockwell Underground Station in London, two weeks after the July 7 bombings in London that killed 56 people. Dick was the “Gold Commander” in charge of the “shoot-to-kill” operation that saw the unsuspecting de Menezes trailed from his flat by anti-terror officers, pinned down in a London underground train and, without warning, shot seven times in the head at point-blank range.

Immediately after de Menezes was murdered, a campaign of police lies and cover-ups began, claiming that his cold-blooded execution was an unfortunate accident under an otherwise lawful and necessary policy. Police cooked up a story about de Menezes wearing a heavy overcoat, which might have concealed explosives, and behaving suspiciously by jumping over the ticket barrier and running onto the train to evade police.

Witnesses at the inquest completely rejected the police account, asserting that de Menezes was lightly attired and walked casually onto the train. They insisted that he received no warning and that firearms officers did not identify themselves. It was also revealed that the firearms officers involved had conferred before writing their statements, that vital CCTV evidence had gone missing, and that the surveillance log had been altered because it contradicted police claims that de Menezes posed a threat.

No police officer was ever found culpable in de Menezes' death. In fact, the inquest went out of its way to exculpate Dick: in a highly unusual move, the judge, Mr Justice Henriques, indicated to the jury that it could insert a caveat into its verdict absolving Dick of personal responsibility for the events. At the inquest, Dick cynically stated: "If you ask me whether I think anybody did anything wrong or unreasonable on the operation, I don't think they did."

The cousin of the slain de Menezes, Patricia Armani da Silva, strongly condemned Dick's appointment, stating, "We have serious concerns... At the helm of the police on that fateful day when Jean was killed was Cressida Dick. The message of today's appointment is that police officers can act with impunity."

"As a family we have always felt that those at the highest level, the commissioner and those in operational command, should be held responsible for the mistakes and for the misinformation and lies that were told by the police," she added.

These concerns were brushed aside by the media. The *Telegraph* dedicated a single, entirely uncritical sentence to the new commissioner's involvement in the murder of an innocent man. *Guardian* columnist Mary Dejevsky, even more repulsively, went as far as to declare that her role in the state killing may even be a bonus!

"If, as is likely," she stated, "those grainy pictures of what happened at Stockwell tube still haunt her... then it is possible that she will be a better leader in general, and a better commissioner of the Met than someone else with no blemish on their career... She will always have before her a salutary reminder of what can go wrong... That knowledge, that awareness, must surely be a plus."

Dejevsky continued: "Individuals make mistakes for many reasons. But to treat a mistake as an automatic disqualification for advancement—even as heinous a mistake as presiding over a botched operation that resulted in the killing of an innocent man—could be depriving organisations, and the country, of leaders who have been tested and will not make the same mistake again."

Rather than automatically barring her from promotion, Dick's bloody history is, on the contrary, seen as providing her with the perfect credentials to occupy high-ranking positions in the police. Prior to her latest appointment, which pays more than £270,000 a year, Dick had already held many senior police roles.

Shortly after the de Menezes' killing, rather than being dismissed, never mind being prosecuted for his murder,

Dick was elevated to the rank of Deputy Assistant Commissioner of Specialist Operations. Her appointment was welcomed by Ken Livingstone, the then-Labour Mayor of London, and his director of Equalities and Policing Lee Jasper, who made a name for himself in the 1990s in the campaigns against the deaths of black people in police custody.

In June 2009 she was again promoted, this time to Assistant Commissioner in charge of the Specialist Crime Directorate, and then to Assistant Commissioner of Specialist Operations in 2011, where she was in charge of counter-terror operations.

It was in this capacity that Dick was responsible for overseeing security at the 2012 London Olympic Games. This operation saw the massive militarisation of the capital, with the deployment of 12,000 police officers, 20,000 privately hired security guards and more than 6,000 soldiers. The main Olympic site was surrounded by 17 kilometres of electrified fencing, with up to 900 cameras 50 metres apart, and patrols by attack and search dog teams.

Dick also spent two years in the Foreign Office as director-general, after the former Met commissioner, Bernard Hogan-Howe, asked her to leave her police counter-terror role. Although the details of this role have not been made public, Dick was thought to be functioning as a high-level state operative dealing with counter-terrorism.

The selection of Dick as the next Commissioner of the Metropolitan Police comes in the wake of the Conservative government's plans to increase the number of armed police officers on the UK's streets by 1,500 before April 2018. Her appointment sends a clear message that the police can and will use repression with complete impunity.



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