

Channel 4 documentary on Jean Charles de Menezes killing part of moves to justify police shoot to kill policy

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Ahead of the 20th anniversary of the police killing in London of Jean Charles de Menezes, his execution is being utilised for propaganda to justify the de facto shoot-to-kill policy now in place.

This is the essence of a two-part Channel 4 documentary, *Shoot To Kill: Terror On The Tube*, shown as part of its *Dispatches* series, on November 10 and 11.

De Menezes, a young Brazilian worker living in London, was shot dead after being wrongly identified as a terrorist suspect on July 22, 2005, the day after a bungled terrorist attempt on the London Underground. Four men planted rucksacks packed with explosives that failed to detonate.

More than seven months ahead of the anniversary, the showing of the documentary this week is clearly part of fevered discussions at the highest levels of the state. Channel 4 concluded that the time to show it was now, just weeks after the acquittal of the police officer who killed an unarmed man, Chris Kaba, in September 2022 in Streatham, London. That verdict occasioned a massive police, government and media blitz demanding, in effect, that police no longer be held accountable over the deaths of civilians.

In September 2023, hundreds of Metropolitan Police officers staged a rebellion, handing in their guns in protest at the announcement of unprecedented murder charges against a firearms officer, later named as Martyn Blake, for the shooting of Kaba. Met Commissioner Sir Mark Rowley demanded that then Conservative Home Secretary Suella Braverman make it much harder to bring criminal charges against officers for shootings. Braverman duly obliged, setting up a review to provide armed police with de facto immunity from future prosecutions.

Within days of Blake's acquittal this campaign saw Labour Home Secretary Yvette Cooper confirming in Parliament, "When officers act in the most dangerous situations on behalf of the state, it is vital that those officers and their families are not put in further danger during any subsequent legal proceedings". As a remedy, the government would now "introduce a presumption of anonymity for firearms officers subject to criminal trial following a police shooting in the course of their professional duties, up to the point of conviction."

Blake's defence in court focused on insisting that Kaba, an unarmed man, had posed an imminent danger to the life of his Met colleagues and therefore had to be killed.

Shoot To Kill: Terror On The Tube, takes the same position in an even cruder form in relation to the most infamous police execution of a civilian in recent British history. The documentary proclaims, "With unprecedented access to the firearms officer who pulled the trigger at Stockwell Underground Station, appearing on camera for the very first time, this two-part series tells the story of the shooting like never before, with contributions from eyewitnesses, officers at the heart of the operation, and the then Prime Minister Tony Blair."

After being wrongly mistaken for one of four bombers in the failed series of attacks on July 21, De Menezes was followed after he left his flat for work by anti-terror officers. They stormed a London Underground train, pinned him down and shot him dead.

The case became notorious for the campaign of misinformation about De Menezes, the despicable treatment of his family and the attempt to cover up Britain's "shoot-to-kill" Operation Kratos policy adopted in secret two years earlier. It was revealed that firearms officers conferred before writing their statements, vital CCTV evidence went missing and the surveillance log was altered.

Although a 2006 Independent Police Complaints Commission report declared that De Menezes had been killed because of avoidable mistakes and identified a number of possible criminal offences by the officers involved, including murder and gross negligence, no action was taken. Numerous attempts to secure justice by the De Menezes family over subsequent years were thwarted.

In the documentary, Tony Blair is ushered in within the first three minutes to uncritically set the tone, regurgitating the state and media line that De Menezes's killing was "a tragic accident" and a "terrible mistake" in the "febrile atmosphere" following the 7/7 suicide bombings, which left 52 people dead.

Blair is aggrieved that news of the UK's successful bid to hold the next Olympic Games and his hosting of the G8 summit at Gleneagles is overshadowed by the terror attacks. He is allowed to spout without comment, "We were dealing with people who have no regard for their own lives never mind the lives of other people, so we couldn't let down our guard at all". All this from an unindicted war criminal and co-architect of the illegal US-led pre-emptive wars of aggression and regime change that led to hundreds of thousands of deaths and the dismemberment of whole societies, and blowback in the shape of the London bombings.

The same uncritical approach is adopted towards De Menezes's killer, firearms officer C12. Although in full face throughout the programme he remained unnamed and tells his version of events virtually unchallenged.

C12 describes how he became involved once the identity of one of the failed bombers, Hussain Osman, became known. After leaving his gym membership card in his rucksack as he fled, Osman quickly became the subject of a major surveillance operation outside his home in Scotia Rd, Brockwell, south London.

De Menezes, who lived in the same block of flats as Osman, was later seen exiting and boarding a bus on his way to catch a train into London. He was designated a possible suspect despite the fact he was lightly attired, not carrying a rucksack and looked nothing like Osman.

Although not openly admitting a lust for revenge, C12 explains how there was a "feeling that we'd failed" by allowing 7/7 to happen and "we were called in and waiting to go".

C12 claims he had "no idea of any times during the actual incident at all" but then goes into great detail during his confessional quest for people to understand his actions. Somewhat unbelievably, he insists that though an officer with a "great deal of experience" who had "worked in hundreds of firearm operations", "Everything told me that I was going to die" at the hands of this lone individual.

C12 tries to absolve himself and colleague "C2" from taking the fatal decision to pump seven 124 grain hollow-tipped dum-dum bullets—"specifically authorised for suicide killer operations to potentially deliver a critical shot"—at point blank range into De Menezes's head. He dwells on how both officers were covered in "debris"—that is, splinters of De Menezes's skull bone, blood and brain tissue—and forbidden to shower for two hours for "evidential purposes."

The documentary shows that C12 took the decision to kill despite the fact that:

1) Although there was initial uncertainty over De Menezes's identity, surveillance record seen in the documentary show that by the time the young man had reached the Underground station the conclusion was, "Don't think it's him".

2) None of the firearms team were given copies of Osman's gym card photo but, unbelievably, told to "commit the grainy image to memory". In the final minutes before the shooting, C12 was "trying to recall the face of the person whom I only had a 10 second glimpse of."

3) He was beset, as car commander in charge of radios, with "broken communications that were inaudible." Communications were also a problem at Stockwell station.

C12 perpetuates the filthy lie that De Menezes's own behaviour was to blame. He states that on the bus the young man was "agitated and looking around" and got off at Brixton station and back on again, which was "interpreted as an anti-surveillance movement"—in fact the station was closed.

C12 claims that as he approached De Menezes on the train, gun held high, he again exhibited unusual behaviour, rising "without supporting himself, hands hovering above his knees". C12 describes how De Menezes "turned towards us. I pointed my gun

at his head, shouted 'Armed police!'"—a claim, as the court case heard, that was disputed by every civilian eyewitness in and around the Underground carriage—"but he kept coming. I knew I had to take that shot or we'll all die."

Fitting like a glove with the narrative of the police having no choice but to kill in such circumstances, C12's sound bite—"I knew I had to take that shot or we'll all die"—features in the vast majority of media review headlines which went on to report C12's revelations at face value.

It was left to Jean Charles's cousin, Katia da Silva, to question C12's story in an interview with the *Mirror* and accuse him of "bragging about the brutality with which he took Jean's life."

Da Silva said she found it difficult to accept that C12 had not bothered to take more than a brief glance at a grainy faxed photograph of the subject. "Operation Kratos was a high-level operation developed to stop terrorism. Would they really make such a basic error? No-one could memorise someone's face in just seconds", she said.

Da Silva disputed C12's claims that her cousin's demeanour was unusual given the circumstances. "On the train, everybody got up to get out as soon as the armed officers ran on, not just Jean. He would never have advanced at him, there was no physical contact. Jean was just a poor electrician with dreams of making a life for himself in London. It's all lies. Hearing these things is hurtful for his family."

Da Silva also bitterly criticised C12's attitude, saying, "He doesn't regret anything." She asked the obvious question, ignored by mainstream commentators, "Why has he decided to talk about this after 20 years?"

In February 2022, former Met Commissioner Cressida Dick, who rose rapidly through the ranks after leading the operation that led to De Menezes's death, was forced to resign following a series of controversies. These included her censure for obstructing an independent inquiry set up to review the murder of the private detective Daniel Morgan in 1987, whose killers were shielded by the police. The Met was labelled "institutionally corrupt."

Dick left the force with a £166,000 pay-off and an annual pension of around the same value. Given her role in the operation that killed De Menezes, and the vast strengthening of the state that followed, it is significant that neither Dick nor Ian Blair—the Met Commissioner at the time—appear in the documentary.

As in all the main imperialist countries, British governments have shifted sharply to the right over the last two decades, strengthening the repressive apparatus of the state in preparation for explosive class struggles. The Israeli genocide in Gaza, backed to the hilt by the Conservative and now Labour government, proves that any concerns about "collateral damage" to innocent civilians have evaporated. *Shoot To Kill: Terror On The Tube* only aids that process.



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