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# Police gun down worker in London subway: another tragic consequence of Blair's war policy

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The public state execution of Jean Charles de Menezes in a London subway carriage on July 22 marks a watershed.

England, the country of the Magna Carta, is now one in which innocent civilians can be shot dead on the capital's streets at the discretion of the police, without any explanation, much less justification, and with the only outcome being a brief statement of regret.

Eyewitnesses have provided horrific accounts of how the petrified 27-year-old Brazilian electrician "looked like a cornered rabbit" as he was pursued by three plain-clothes officers into the train carriage, before being pinned to the ground and shot five times in the head at point blank range.

At a press conference afterwards, Metropolitan Police Commissioner Sir Ian Blair claimed that the killing was "directly linked to the ongoing and expanding anti-terrorist operation" following the July 7 bombings of the capital's transport network which killed 56 people, and an apparent failed attempt to detonate devices on July 21.

Not only did Menezes have no connection with the terror attacks, police had no grounds to suspect that he might be involved in such crimes, or any others, for that matter. That he was seen leaving a house that had been placed under police surveillance wearing "suspicious" clothes was enough for police to act as judge, jury and executioner.

Given suggestions that the shooting may not have been carried out by police officers at all, but by members of the security forces or the SAS, everyone has the right to ask just what type of Orwellian dystopia has been created in Blair's Britain.

Menezes' death is not a blameless consequence of the July 7 bombings, as is now being claimed. Over the past two weeks, an officially sanctioned climate of hysteria and panic has been consciously whipped up, in which the state has been given carte blanche.

The government itself has a vested interest in generating such an atmosphere in order to avoid having to answer damaging questions. Whilst police have demanded new powers to detain people without charge for up to three months, the government has made clear its intention to rush through new legislation, including making it a criminal offence to "glorify" or "condone" terrorism, with major ramifications for free speech.

It is under these conditions that it has emerged that the rules governing police use of firearms have been officially revised and a de facto shoot-to-kill policy secretly adopted.

Even as Prime Minister Tony Blair insists that emergency measures are not directed against "any community" in particular, but solely against those bent on terror, the media is filled with demands by so-called "security analysts" for all young black and Asian males to be treated with suspicion, in much the same way as Irish people in previous decades.

There is, however, one crucial difference. In March 1988, when the SAS shot dead three suspected IRA terrorists in Gibraltar, there were repeated denials that the British state had an assassination policy.

Not so today. Writing in the *Daily Mail*, before the police admission that they had killed an innocent man, Tom Bower opined: "In normal times, yesterday's state execution of a suspect in a Tube train in the middle of the capital would have evoked a tidal wave of revulsion and protest."

The terror threat, however, had changed all that, he wrote. Britain's Muslims, in particular, would have to accept that "many civil liberties will have to be infringed." Security requirements would now involve the suspension of Habeas Corpus, "unexplained arrests," and even "the more common use of such police assassination."

Just where are the powers-that-be intending to take Britain next? Already, the police have reaffirmed their policy of shoot-to-kill, with Blair's backing. For good reason, many are querying in the wake of Menezes' shooting whether anyone can be considered a legitimate target, just so much "collateral damage" in the so-called "war against terror."

All those who retain a commitment to democratic rights must reject the argument, being hammered out by the political establishment and the media, that to draw a connection between Iraq and the July 7 bombings is to "excuse" terrorism.

This spurious charge has been the constant mantra not only of Blair and Foreign Secretary Jack Straw. In the US, *New York Times* columnist Thomas Friedman claimed that those who pointed the finger of responsibility at the US and British governments' actions in the Middle East were "just one notch less despicable than the terrorists."

Writing in the *Observer* July 10, Nick Cohen declared, under the headline, "Face Up to the Truth," that "we all know what was to blame for Thursday's [July 7] murders… and it wasn't Bush and Blair."

Just days after stating that Britain's foreign policy in the Middle East had played a role in creating the conditions for the July 7 attacks, London Mayor Ken Livingstone effectively absolved the government and the police for Menezes' killing, stating, "This tragedy has added another victim to the toll of deaths for which the terrorists bear responsibility."

Such cowardice and opportunism are what one has come to expect from Livingstone. But it is a matter of fact that both the July 7 bombings and Menezes' killing tragically vindicate the many millions of people in the UK and internationally who marched in February 2003 to oppose the war against Iraq.

Those who continue to claim otherwise are arguing an absurdity. In the aftermath of the

Second World War, the use of war as a means of achieving strategic policy objectives was deemed Nazi Germany's ultimate crime, from which all others—including fascist genocide—inexorably flowed. On these grounds, and with British backing, leaders of the Third Reich were hung by their necks until they were dead.

Blair is no less guilty of war crimes and is morally and politically culpable for the events in London.

The overwhelming majority of British people opposed the war against Iraq precisely because its catastrophic implications could be foreseen. There was no end of warnings that the resulting destabilisation of the Middle East would increase the likelihood of terrorist attacks in major metropolitan areas and the imposition of greater security measures, with dangerous implications for civil liberties.

Blair dismissed such concerns, famously proclaiming that the essence of democracy was the refusal of governments to do what the people demanded. In his slavish subservience to US imperialism and the financial interests of British capital, the prime minister was determined that no obstacles be placed in the way of what he believed would be a triumphant joyride to Iraq's oilfields on the coat-tails of the Bush administration.

The reality is that the population of the UK is being made to reap the whirlwind—both with their lives and the abrogation of their democratic rights—of Blair's criminal negligence.

As Shakespeare knew only too well, from foul deeds endless tragedy arises. As the Bard might have said of July 7 and the day the Brazilian worker was killed: *This day's black fate on more days doth depend*. (*Romeo and Juliet*, Act III). And what foul deeds this government is responsible for.

It is a matter of record that the war against Iraq was prepared and commissioned on the basis of lies. There was no link between Saddam Hussein's regime and the 9/11 attacks on the US, nor did Iraq possess weapons of mass destruction as was claimed.

Neither the truth nor international law, however, was allowed to stand in the way. Documents were plagiarised and intelligence manipulated as the government sought to concoct "facts" to justify its predetermined war aims.

When these lies were exposed, Blair resorted to new lies: that the war and subsequent occupation had made the world a safer place and had created the basis for democratic renewal not only in Iraq but throughout the Middle East.

Instead, Iraq is a bloody quagmire. Not only has the country's infrastructure been devastated, but tens of thousands of civilians have been killed—70 percent of them having died after the war was officially deemed to be over. From Abu Ghraib to Guantánamo Bay, the world has witnessed the sickening reality of Blair and Bush's "democratic" vision.

At the same time, Britain and the US are being turned into virtual police dictatorships, in which civilians can be snatched from the streets and held without charge, and death squads can roam the streets in broad daylight, killing with apparent impunity.

In the weeks to come, Blair and his apologists will continue to utilise the threat of terrorism to avoid any accounting for his war policy and justify its continuation, along with ever more massive attacks on democratic rights.

We reject this entirely. The fight against imperialist war and the defence of democratic rights are one and the same.

There is a means through which terror attacks can be brought to an end—by ending the policies that have created the climate for them in the first place. That requires a struggle against the capitalist ruling elites which launched an imperialist war on Iraq in order to seize control of the country's oil resources.

The mass opposition to militarism and war must be revived and carried forward in the convening of protests, demonstrations and conferences across the UK, Europe and internationally to demand an end to the occupation of Iraq, the immediate withdrawal of all foreign troops, and that all those responsible for commissioning the war be held legally and politically accountable for its consequences.



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