

PRESS RELEASE

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REPORT INTO DEATH OF BLAIR PEACH RELEASED AFTER NEARLY THREE DECADES OF SECRECY

The Metropolitan Police Service (MPS) today released the report of Commander Cass into the events surrounding the death of Blair Peach in Southall, west London, on 23 April 1979. (download here: <http://bit.ly/bQnrfa>)

Celia Stubbs, partner of Blair Peach, said:

This report totally vindicates what we have always believed – that Blair was killed by one of six officers from Unit 1 of the Special Patrol Group whose names have been in the public domain over all these years: Insp Murray, PC White, PC Richardson, PC Scottow, PC Freestone and PS Lake. That serves only to emphasise that there can be no excuse for the way in which the writer of the report, like the police generally, sought to criminalise the many protestors including Blair at the demonstration against the National Front election meeting.

Celia Stubb's solicitor, Raju Bhatt of Bhatt Murphy Solicitors, said:

The mindset of Commander Cass and his approach to his investigation is betrayed by the following excerpt from his report where he sought to define its terms of reference and context:

"TERMS OF INVESTIGATION

My brief is to investigate the circumstances surrounding the death, so I do not propose to enlarge much further on the events of that day except to emphasise that it was an extremely violent volatile and ugly situation where there was serious disturbance by what can be classed as a 'rebellious crowd'. The legal definition 'unlawful assembly' is justified and the event should be viewed with that kind of atmosphere prevailing. Without condoning the death I refer to Archbold 38th edition para 2528: "In case of riot or rebellious assembly the officers endeavouring to disperse the riot are justified in killing them at common law if the riot cannot otherwise be suppressed [*sic*]."

It is telling that, despite these instincts, the investigation was driven by the weight of the evidence to conclude that the fatal blow to Blair Peach was struck by a police

Inquest

officer whose actions were then concealed by his brother officers. A clear and unequivocal acknowledgement to that effect is now required from the Metropolitan Police, so that we can all be confident that the years of obfuscation and prevarication have been left behind for once and for all.

Deborah Coles, Co-Director of INQUEST, said:

The family, friends and community have waited for 31 years for some public recognition and acknowledgement that the police were responsible for Blair's death. We call upon Sir Paul Stephenson to publicly acknowledge for the first time that a Metropolitan Police officer was responsible the fatal truncheon blow that killed him. The whole police investigation into what happened on 23 April 1979 was clearly designed as an exercise in managing the fallout from the events of that iconic day in Southall, to exonerate police violence in the face of legitimate public protest. The echoes of that exercise sound across the decades to the events of the G20 protest and the death of Ian Tomlinson in 2009.

Notes to editors:

1) A more comprehensive response to the disclosure of the report and its underlying material will be made available in due course, hopefully on the occasion of the personal meeting which is being sought with Sir Paul Stephenson.

2) INQUEST is the only organisation in England and Wales that provides a specialist, comprehensive advice service on contentious deaths and their investigation to bereaved people, lawyers, other advice and support agencies, the media, parliamentarians and the wider public. Its casework priorities are deaths in prison and in police custody, in immigration detention and in secure training centres. INQUEST develops policy proposals and undertakes research to campaign for changes to the inquest and investigation process, reduce the number of custodial deaths, and improve the treatment and care of those within the institutions where the deaths occur.

3) INQUEST is represented on the Ministerial Council on Deaths in Custody and the Ministry of Justice Coroner Service Stakeholder Forum.



4) INQUEST's first book, *Death and Disorder*, published in 1986, examined deaths involving the police during - or which sparked - public disorder - Kevin Gately (who died during a protest in Red Lion Square in 1974), Blair Peach and Cynthia Jarrett, whose death during a police raid prompted the notorious Broadwater Farm disturbances in 1985 during which PC Keith Blakelock was killed. *Death and Disorder* looks at these three deaths in the context of others involving public disorder, from the infamous Peterloo Massacre of 1819 to the sometimes fatal use of troops and police against strikers in the first half of the twentieth century.

Nearly 30 years to the day after Blair Peach died, the controversial circumstances surrounding the death of Ian Tomlinson who was caught up in the police response to the G20 protests while he walked home in the City of London on 1 April 2009 demonstrate there is still much to be concerned about the policing of demonstrations. 24 years later, *Death and Disorder* offers clear evidence of what went wrong three decades and more ago, and why the need for INQUEST to work to help bereaved families through the coroners court - and to press for their reform - remains as important as in 1981.

Death and Disorder is available to buy from the INQUEST website.

Further Information	www.inquest.org.uk
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