

Britain: Police justification for Taser killing in Manchester unravels

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The police justification for the recent fatal shooting with a Taser gun of a young man in Manchester, England has begun to unravel.

Jordan Begley, a 23-year-old factory worker, was shot on July 10 at approximately 8:15 p.m. by officers from the Greater Manchester Police (GMP). The incident took place at his mother's home where he lived in Beard Road, Gorton. Jordan died within two hours of being shot with the Taser, which carries a 50,000-volt charge.

The police action has drawn criticism and outrage from Begley's employer, neighbours, friends and above all from his mother, Dorothy Begley.

Mrs. Begley has spoken out to challenge the police version of events, which claim her son was armed with a knife. She believes that his life was taken because he was the victim of mistaken identity.

She explained that she called the police following a dispute between her son and a neighbour in an attempt to pacify the situation. She is adamant that when she made the 999 call there was no reference to any involvement of a weapon, contrary to the claims by the police.

Mrs. Begley told the *Manchester Evening News* (MEN), "Two officers arrived at first and everything was calm, they were on the doorstep chatting but then loads of vans turned up with armed officers and they forced him inside. He was calm and compliant and doing everything they told him and for that reason I thought everything was going to be okay.

"I was outside looking in through the front door and I could see they had a Taser pointed at him, he had his arms by his side and was still following instructions.

"One of the officers kept saying 'step back, step back' but he was against the dining room table and couldn't step back any further. At that point one of the

officers closed the front door on me."

Other eyewitness accounts described a scene in which Jordan Begley had been cooperative while the police conduct was of a belligerent nature. Begley's employer, who was driving past the house at the time, described seeing the young man at the door talking to police officers. He had stopped, but was told by police to move on. He described the police as acting "quite aggressive" and Begley's death as preventable.

Mrs. Begley has recounted how she was repeatedly questioned by officers about her links to the Sale area of Greater Manchester after her son was taken to the hospital following being shot. A 25-year-old man of the same name from that area was wanted on recall to prison after breaching the terms of his license. This person had been jailed for burglary and involved in a prison riot.

The independent post-mortem arranged by the family recorded a number of injuries to Jordan Begley, involving carpet burns down the right side of his face and marks to his wrists, indicating he had been handcuffed. There was bruising sustained to other parts of his body, including his arms and legs, indicating the degree of force used by police officers, ten of whom had entered the property while his mother was shut outside.

Mr. Begley had shown symptoms of a heart condition, which he was being diagnosed for, and his mother says she warned police officers of this at the time.

A cover-up is underway, with the police stating that Mr. Begley died "some point" after being Tasered after "he suffered a medical episode." The post-mortem ordered by the Home Office was inconclusive as to the cause of death. The Begley family are to mount a civil case against Greater Manchester Police.

The matter has been referred for further investigation to the Independent Police Complaints Commission (IPCC), the police self-regulatory body. The IPCC and its predecessor have failed to bring a single conviction against any police officer for deaths in police custody. Between 1997 and 2007 there were 530 such incidents in England and Wales.

The brutal end to the life of this young worker is not an isolated episode, but is symptomatic of the indiscriminate way in which Tasers are deployed by police officers throughout the UK on a day-to-day basis. This latest fatality brings to a total of 10 the number of people who have died in England and Wales since 2006 after being shot by police with a Taser. Only two months prior to Begley's shooting, police officers in Plymouth, south-west England, were responsible for another Taser-related fatality. Andrew Pimlott had doused himself in petrol and was threatening to commit suicide when the police decided to fire the electrical device at the man covered in flammable liquid. He died several days later from serious burns after being consumed in flames.

Tasers were first introduced to the UK in 2004. Originally they were only issued to firearms officers as a supposed "less lethal alternative." By 2007, Taser guns were for the first time issued to non-firearm officers.

According to the Association of Chief Police Officers, around 8,000 additional Tasers were introduced to police forces between 2009 and 2010. At present nearly 13,800 officers across 43 forces in England and Wales—10 percent of the force—are trained to use the weapon.

Under plans drawn up by the London mayor, the Metropolitan Police are to increase the number of police officers issued with Tasers from 800 to 1,300—a more than 50 percent increase.

Far from being a measure of last resort during a severe threat of violence, Tasers are now being used routinely and against the most vulnerable sections of society.

In addition to increased use of Tasers against children, figures recorded by the Metropolitan Police show a rise in their use against people with mental health problems, from 20 percent to 30 percent between 2008 and 2011.

Police are operating with such impunity that they

blatantly ignore the guidance produced by the manufacturers on how to reduce the risk to life. Arizona-based manufacturer Taser International has been prosecuted twice in the US for its liability in deaths related to police use of the weapon. In 2009 the company was obliged to issue a warning to avoid shots to the chest in order to reduce the risk of cardiac arrest, but police in the UK have carried on regardless.

According to recent figures published in the *Guardian*, 57 percent of all Taser discharges resulted in individuals being hit in the chest between 2009 and 2012. These are not complete figures due to the fact that only 18 of the 45 UK police forces provided data in response to the Freedom of Information request.

The pervasive use of Tasers cannot simply be put down to "mission creep". The routine resort to police brutality and violation of civil liberties is the hallmark of a society riven with social inequality, in which the state serves more openly as an instrument of coercion in the hands of the wealthy elite.



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