

## PRESS RELEASE

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### 30 YEARS ON INQUEST REMEMBERS BLAIR PEACH

Thirty years ago today, on 23 April 1979, Blair Peach died as a result of being hit over the head by police. He, along with thousands of others, was demonstrating against the National Front in Southall, West London. No police officer was ever charged or prosecuted in relation to his death which raised serious concerns about the use of excessive force and the lawless behaviour of police officers from the Metropolitan Police Special Patrol Group while policing the demonstration.

There are evocative and disturbing parallels between his death and that of Ian Tomlinson. The public concerns about police tactics at the G20 demonstration and in particular the focus on the supervision and tactics of the Territorial Support Group are eerily familiar. As was the case 30 years ago, a principled democratic debate about police powers and methods is vital. So too is fundamental reform of the investigation and inquest system.

It was the negative experience of Blair Peach's family and friends with the investigation and inquest system that led them to join with others and set up INQUEST in 1981. Sadly, the need for the organisation remains as urgent today as then. Since it was set up it has worked on a daily basis with bereaved families of people who die in all forms of custody – in prison, following police contact, in immigration and psychiatric detention and in secure training centres.

Many of the deaths raise issues of: negligence; systemic failures to care for the vulnerable; institutional violence, racism, sexism and inhumane treatment; and the abuse of human rights and state and corporate accountability. Cases often reveal a catalogue of failings in the treatment and care of vulnerable people in custody or otherwise dependent on others for their care. Families seeking the truth about their relatives' death face an array of problems – lack of independent information and support, no non means tested funding for legal representation, delays of years in the investigation and inquest system, failure to prosecute or discipline and to ensure similar deaths are prevented.

#### Notes to editors:



The Coroners and Justice Bill 2009 is currently making its way through parliament and we are lobbying to ensure that there is root and branch reform of the inquest system.

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

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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. 23 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.

INQUEST is the only non-governmental organisation in England and Wales that works directly with the families of those who die in custody. It provides an independent free legal and advice service to bereaved people on inquest procedures and their rights in the coroner's courts and conducts policy work on the issues arising.

INQUEST is campaigning to ensure that the Coroners and Justice Bill 2009 results in fundamental reform of an inquest system currently hampered by delay, inconsistency of approach and lack of resources and unable to fulfil its vital function of preventing unnecessary deaths.

The government must also make changes to ensure that bereaved families can participate effectively in inquest hearings by having equal access, alongside the police and Prison Service, to non means-tested public funding for their legal representation. [INQUEST's briefing on the Coroners & Justice Bill](#)

Further Information	<a href="http://www.inquest.org.uk">www.inquest.org.uk</a>
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