Roger Sylvester Justice Campaign

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NEWSLETTER NO. 3 February 2000

Justice for Roger Sylvester "One Year On"

On 11 January 1999, Roger Sylvester, a 30 year old black man, was restrained outside his home by eight police officers, from Tottenham Police Station. He sustained numerous injuries and was later in a coma on a life support system. Seven days later, Roger was dead.

FOND FAMILY MEMORIES

Roger with Mum and Dad

Roger was the most friendly person we knew. He would always go out of his way to greet family and friends. He was always helpful to those less fortunate than himself. He was a genius with numbers. You only had to tell him a phone number once and he would remember it. No one in the family kept a diary with birthdays and anniversaries, Roger was always there to call and remind us of important dates.

Some press articles have mentioned Roger's depression. The background to this illness was, shortly after leaving North London College, he was the victim of an unprovoked vicious assault, requiring 26 stitches to a wound on his face. As a result of this, he suffered periodic bouts of depression.

This did not prevent Roger from being a productive member of society. While in employment, despite his problems, Roger's true personality and qualities shone through. He was sincere and loved helping people.

Coping with Roger's depression was not always easy. However, during the last two years of his life he succeeded in bringing his depression under control. He did this, with the help of professionals, the undiminished support of his family, and his amazing courage. He had high hopes and aspirations for the millennium and often talked of it as being his year.

RSJC WITNESS APPEAL

On the first anniversary of the incident the RSJC held a candle lit vigil outside Tottenham Police Station. Over 200 people attenend and on that evening we launched an appeal for witnesses.

WHY WE NEED WITNESSES

Although Essex Police have concluded their investigation into Roger's death, many unanswered questions remain. RSJC have launched an appeal because we believe there are still witnesses who have not come forward. We have distributed thousands of leaflets in the Tottenham area appealing for witnesses to come forward.

Roger on life support. How did this happen?

CURRENT LEGAL POSITION

Daniel Machover, Hickman & Rose (Family Solicitor)

One year after Roger was wrongly detained by police officers whilst on his own doorstep, the current legal position is as follows:-

Essex Police have completed their investigation into Roger's death and the family's complaints about the conduct of the police officers concerned.

The Police Complaints Authority has certified that it is happy that the investigation was thorough, so the papers were formally sent to the Crown Prosecution Service (CPS) in October.

A specialist unit within the CPS will decide if there is sufficient evidence and it is in the public interest for Essex Police to charge any Met police officer with any criminal offence. This is called 'advice' and is done with the involvement of an outside barrister, following last year's Butler Report.

The CPS advice to Essex Police is expected in the first quarter of 2000.

Disclosure of documents by Essex have been very limited, but the family's pathologist, Dr Cary, has finally been allowed access to the expert reports commissioned by Essex police.

Dr Cary will now supply his supplementary report to the family, to pass to the CPS.

The St Ann's Mental Health Trust internal review is complete. It has not been disclosed to anyone.

If there are no prosecutions, the inquest will be held on **5th June 2000.**

A complaint to the General Medical Council (GMC) against Dr Patel, the original pathologist for the HM Coroner, is under active investigation by the GMC.

FAMILY MEETINGS WITH THE INVESTIGATION TEAM

The Police Complaints Authority (PCA) initially appointed a division of the Metropolitan Police to investigate Roger's death. The investigating officers had preconceived ideas about the way Roger died and this was borne out in initial press reports. After a complaint by the family about the attitude of one of the Met officer's attitude to the incident, the PCA appointed Essex Police to investigate.

Over the course of several months the family has had a series of meetings with our PCA representative and members of the Essex Police Investigation Team at our solicitor's office. These meetings were to provide updates. We were never satisfied with the conclusions of any of the meetings.

Why are we dissatisfied with the investigation?

The PCA and investigation team told us that the 8 officers would provide a proper account of what happened on that fatal night.

The PCA is not independent, they did not behave in an impartial way at meetings.

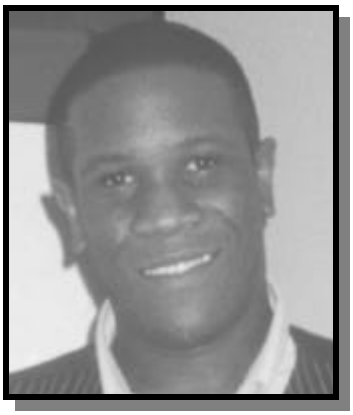
Essex Police used these meetings to read out carefully selected extracts from witness statements but these mainly included the parts that gave a good impression of the police officers' conduct. They did not provide a full picture of what happened or shed any light on certain aspects of the case such as why Roger was being followed by the police on that night or how he sustained his serious injuries.

The PCA's decision to meet the family regularly was simply a Public Relations exercise to diffuse public anger about Roger's death, particularly because this incident coincided with the publication of the McPherson report.

UNISON TRIBUTE

Louise Raw, UNISON

Remembering Roger Sylvester



At the beginning of last year, Roger was a young man with his whole life in front of him, looking forward to the new millennium.

Even after all this time it's still hard to believe that Roger isn't ever going to walk into the union office or phone us again. He always stood out, and was a pleasure to speak with, because he was so polite and friendly. He had a very gentle way about him and a deep rumbling laugh, which was infectious. Having met Roger's family. I can see where he got it from, and I wish that I could have met them under different circumstances.

None of us in the UNISON office will ever forget the day we heard what had happened to Roger. We were plunged into shock and disbelief. It simply made no sense that this lovely man, who wouldn't hurt a fly, could have met such a brutal end.

Islington UNISON is 100% behind Roger's family and friends in their campaign for justice, and it's an honour to help in any way

we can. Their courage and dignity in the face of such terrible grief and loss has been an inspiration, and we have learned such a lot from them.

We hope that this New Year will bring answers to the family's questions and the bringing to justice of those responsible for Roger's death. Nothing can give those who loved him the one thing they really want Roger back with them- but at least then they could have some peace of mind and the chance to rest and to grieve properly.

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WORK WITH UNITED FAMILY AND FRIENDS CAMPAIGN

United Family and Friends is an organisation set up by families who have lost their loved ones in custody. RSJC is working with them to share experiences and to join forces to campaign for the changes we would like to see.

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INQUEST

Deborah Coles – Co-Director
Gilly Mundy – Caseworker

INQUEST is a non-governmental organisation that since 1980 has been involved in supporting and advising the families of people who have died in police custody, in prison and psychiatric and special hospitals. We have grave concerns about the circumstances of Roger Sylvester's death and the serious issues it raises, in particular about:

- police restraint methods
- the disproportionate number of black men who die in police custody,
- the way the police are investigated by the police
- the lack of rights for families.

Since his tragic death we have been working with his family and the Roger Sylvester Justice Campaign in their fight for the truth and justice.

Neither a criminal trial nor an inquest can raise the many wider issues of public concern. An independent inquiry is vital to ensure proper scrutiny of this case and to show that justice is seen to be done. Roger's tragic death was an opportunity for the Government to show that it was willing to learn the lessons from the Lawrence Inquiry. That they failed to hold an independent inquiry is a telling reminder of how far we have to go. We can have no confidence in an investigation that relies on the police investigating the conduct of other police and which forms the basis on which decisions are made as to whether to bring criminal or disciplinary charges.

In the absence of any prosecution, the inquest is the only public forum in which the death is subject to scrutiny. The inquest has a very narrow remit and is primarily concerned with the medical cause of death and yet, is the only forum in which the police version of events can be challenged and where evidence can be tested. Public funding is not available for families to be represented despite the fact that unlimited public funds are available for the Metropolitan Police and Health Authority to be represented. Many deaths in custody of Black people raise profound questions about the brutality, negligence and racism institutionalised within the police force, the absence of accountability at all levels and stages in the investigative and disciplinary process and the failure of the criminal justice system to deal with police officers responsible for violence and misconduct.

INQUEST will work with Roger's family and the **RSJC** in the fight for truth, justice and accountability.

The RSJC would like to thank everyone who has supported us over the last year and hope that you continue to do so.

A POEM FOR ROGER SYLVESTER

By Helen Udenweze
(Work Colleague)

Roger Roger
Our dear son, Friend and brother
What happened to you is unjust
And bringing those who did this to justice is a must
Your Star was plucked from the heavens way before its time
But we will never forget it's beautiful shine
We bless the day that you were born
And your memory in our heart minds and Soul will live on
What happened to you is a mystery
Now you have become a part of our history
Raise all your banners!
And let your voices shout!
What Happened to Roger
We must find out!!

Roger Sylvester Justice Campaign Diary of Events

January 1999:
11th Roger restrained outside his home.
14th Misleading press statement issued by the Met.
18th Roger declared brain stem dead.
19th Roger's life support system switched off.
19th Roger Sylvester Justice Campaign formed.
22nd Inquest agree to support the campaign.
23rd First contact with United Family and Friends.
24th Vigil outside Tottenham Police Station.
26th Inquest into Roger's death opened and adjourned. Dr Patel, pathologist makes inaccurate statement to the press. Official complaint made to the coroner about Dr Patel's behaviour.
27th RSJC officially named.
30th Raised Roger's death with the Grenadian High Commission.

February:
5th First RSJC leaflet published.
8th New pathologist, Professor Venezis appointed.
10th Roger's parents wrote to the Home Secretary.
25th Lambo, Roger's employer hold a memorial service.

March:
21st RSJC held their first public meeting, 600 people in attendance.

April:
12th Meeting with Paul Boateng MP.
16th Roger laid to rest.
21st Meeting with John Stephens, then Deputy Commissioner now Commissioner of the Met
26th Meeting between Family and Friends and the Home Secretary.
27th Apology from the Met about press statement.

May:
27th Bernie Grant laid down Early Day Motion in the House of Commons.
28th London Weekend Television broadcast a short documentary about Roger's death.

June:
16th RSJC spoke at Unison Annual Conference.
21st Meeting with Keith Mitchell, the Grenadian Prime Minister.

July:
25th Roger Sylvester Justice Campaign Aerobathon.

August:
17th Vigil at Home Office on what would have been Roger's 31st Birthday. 30 black balloons released.

September:
26th RSJC addressed a fringe meeting at the Labour Party Conference.

October:
29th Mrs Sylvester issued press statement voicing her dissatisfaction with the investigation.
30th United Family and Friends Campaign march to 10 Downing Street.

November:
1st PCA completed their supervision of the investigation and 7 volumes of evidence passed to the CPS.
5th RSJC Fundraising dance.
18th Linton Kwesi Johnson support concert.

December:
2nd Meeting with Bernie Grant MP.

January 2000:
11th Vigil at Tottenham Police Station.
11th Witness appeal Launched.
16th Memorial service.

RSJC DEMANDS:

- **Police officers involved in custody deaths are suspended until investigations are completed.**
- **Officers responsible for deaths should face criminal charges even if retired or otherwise.**
- **All deaths in custody should be investigated independently.**
- **Police Complaints Authority (PCA) to be replaced by a body independent of the police.**
- **Police forces are made accountable to the communities they serve.**
- **Legal aid and full disclosure should be made available to the relatives of the victims).**
- **Where an unlawful killing verdict is returned, a prosecution should follow automatically.**

I would like further details about the Roger Sylvester Justice Campaign:

Name/Organisation ——————————————————————————

Address ——————————————————————————

Post Code——————————————Telephone No.——————————————

I wish to donate £…….. To the Roger Sylvester Justice Campaign.
All cheques should be made payable to: **Roger Sylvester Justice Campaign**.
Account No: **31238892** Sort Code: **40 03 33** Bank Name: **HSBC**

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