

Orgreave inquiry: yes or no?

The organiser of the Orgreave Truth and Justice Campaign is “alarmed” that the Independent Police Complaints Commission will not indicate whether it will conduct a full investigation into events outside the Orgreave coking works during the Miners Strike in 1984.

Orgreave, near Rotherham, is one of the most contentious issues in the year-long dispute between members of the National Union of Mineworkers and Margaret Thatcher’s government. From late May, an attempt to prevent the movement of coal into the plant and coke coming out was mounted by pickets who were met by police forces from across Britain.

‘Frame-up’

On 18 June that year, 4,500 police, many in riot gear, met 8,000 striking miners. In the clashes that followed 95 miners were charged with riot and unlawful assembly. But the trial of the first 15 in 1985 collapsed due to the unreliability of police evidence.

Each prosecution was backed by two officers making near identical statements. All subsequent charges were dropped and South Yorkshire Police (SYP) paid out £425,000 in out of court settlements. But no new investigation was ordered and no officer was disciplined in what Michael Mansfield QC, who represented three miners, said was “the biggest frame-up ever”.

Police misconduct

Since 2012, the Independent Police Complaints Commission (IPCC) has been running an initial investigation. Following a November 2014 meeting with IPCC chair Dame Anne Owers the OTJC was anticipating an IPCC announcement early this year on whether or not it would be holding a full investigation.

However, the IPCC has now indicated that it will not make an announcement until it has taken legal advice and consulted with its Hillsborough investigation team, which is



Police and miners at Orgreave Colliery, June 1984. Photo: Steve Eason/Hulton Archive/Getty Images

examining events at the 1989 FA Cup semi-final in which 95 Liverpool fans died. SYP doctored the statements of officers at Hillsborough and is now at the centre of the IPCC’s biggest investigation ever into alleged police misconduct.

Strike action

The IPCC has agreed to give advance notice of the decision to the OTJC so it can organise a press conference the next day. But although it has made its decision, it has yet to inform the OTJC what it is – an omission that has “alarmed” OTJC organiser Barbara Jackson.

“Following the November meeting we did not believe there might be any problems holding up the announcement for any considerable time,” said Jackson, who herself took strike action in 1984-85 as an administrative officer for the National Coal Board. “It has already taken over two years for a scoping exercise. Meanwhile

the miners who were so badly treated are older and frailer.

“We intend making Orgreave an issue at the forthcoming general election and now fear that no announcement might be made until after the Hillsborough inquests have concluded – and that might be another year or more.

Legal advice

“We want the IPCC to make an announcement very shortly even if it means we must wait until after the Hillsborough inquests hearings that started on 31 March 2014 are concluded.”

An IPCC spokesperson said: “We are awaiting the result of our consultation with our Hillsborough investigation team and legal advice from our barrister before we can proceed further. We appreciate the concerns about the delays, but we cannot comment further at this stage.”

MARK METCALF

Teachers suspenc

Schools are short-staffed because teachers are being suspended if they live with someone who has committed a serious offence, according to the trade union Unison.

Department for Education guidance states that school staff can now be “disqualified by association”. This means that if school staff, including teachers, are living with someone who has been convicted of a violent or sexual crime they can face suspension from their jobs. To return to work they must obtain a waiver from the schools’ inspectorate Ofsted, which can take up to two months.

The guidance says this guards against an individual working with children who may be “under the influence of a person who lives with them and where that person may pose a threat to children by association”.