

WRITTEN MINISTERIAL STATEMENT ON ORGREAVE

Monday 31 October 2016

The Government has been considering a submission from the Orgreave Truth & Justice Campaign on the need for an Inquiry or independent review into the events that occurred at Orgreave Coking Plant on 18 June 1984, and subsequently.

This has been a difficult decision to make, and one which I have thought about very carefully. I have now concluded that there is not a sufficient basis for me to instigate either a statutory inquiry or an independent review. I know that this decision will come as a significant disappointment to the Orgreave Truth and Justice Campaign and its supporters and I have set out in a letter to them today the detailed reasons for my decision which include the following points.

Despite the forceful accounts and arguments provided by the campaigners and former miners who were present that day, about the effect that these events have had on them, ultimately there were no deaths or wrongful convictions.

The Campaigners say that had the consequences of the events at Orgreave been addressed properly at the time, the tragic events at Hillsborough would never have happened five years later. That is not a conclusion which I believe can be reached with any certainty.

It was absolutely right that the Government established the Hillsborough Independent Panel. Significantly the Panel's report led to the High Court quashing the original inquests verdicts and the opening of the fresh inquests. The jury's determinations and findings were unequivocal and clear: 96 victims were unlawfully killed. The criminal investigations should now be allowed to proceed unimpeded. The IPCC is working with the CPS to assess whether material related to the policing at Orgreave is relevant to the Hillsborough criminal investigations. The intention is that criminal investigations in respect of Hillsborough will provide files to the CPS by the turn of the year following which the CPS will make decisions about whether any criminal proceedings will be brought as a result.

The Campaign and their supporters explained to me when I met them that they want to get to the bottom of what happened on the 18 June 1984, and that only by doing so will their trust, and that of their community, be restored in the police.

However, there have been very significant changes in the oversight of policing since 1984, at every level, including major reforms to criminal procedure, changes to public order policing and practice, stronger external scrutiny and greater local accountability.

The operational delivery and practice of public order policing has moved on a great deal from the arrangements in 1984, and tactics have now been reviewed and altered several times both by the police and the courts.

Protections which were singularly lacking at the time of Orgreave now exist with the introduction in the mid-80s of the Police & Criminal Evidence Act which has vastly improved the way police investigations and powers operate.

The creation of the Crown Prosecution Service in 1986, with the introduction of independent CPS prosecutors, fundamentally altered the prosecution of offences. It ended the existence of ad hoc prosecution arrangements across the country whereby a mixture of police prosecutors and private firms of solicitors - hired by the police and acting for and on the instruction of the police – conducted prosecutions.

With regards to the external scrutiny of complaints against the police, this was strengthened by the creation, in 1985, of the Police Complaints Authority which was replaced in 2004 by the more effective Independent Police Complaints Commission and in turn will be replaced by the Office for Police Conduct in 2017. The exemplary standards of behaviour expected of everyone who works in policing were reinforced by the introduction of a statutory Code of Ethics, laid before this House in 2014.

Lastly, the introduction of directly elected Police and Crime Commissioners in 2012 has given the public a voice in shaping their local policing priorities and improved the accountability of police leadership.

Over 30 years later, policing is very different and one of my key concerns as Home Secretary is to ensure there is a policing system which works effectively and fairly

now. The policing landscape has changed fundamentally since 1984 – at the political, legislative and operational levels. The same is true also for the wider criminal justice system.

There would therefore be very few lessons for the policing system today to be learned from any review of the events and practices of three decades ago. This is a very important consideration when looking at the necessity for an inquiry or independent review and the public interest to be derived from holding one.

Taking these considerations into account I do not believe that establishing any kind of inquiry is required to allay public concerns or for any other reason.

I believe that we should focus on continuing to ensure that the policing system is the best it can be for the future, including through reforms before Parliament in the Policing and Crime Bill, so that we can have the best possible policing both in South Yorkshire and across the country.