



From Peterloo to Orgreave

THIRTY-FIVE years this summer one of the most brutal attacks in the history of industrial disputes took place at the Orgreave Coking Plant in South Yorkshire when striking miners were violently assaulted by the police and charged with riot.

Many of them were seriously injured, some nearly died and 95 were charged with riot or unlawful assembly. A year later all were acquitted after a trial that saw the prosecution case collapse following 10 weeks of inconsistencies, contradictions and blatant lies in the police evidence. Not one single officer has ever been disciplined or charged with any offence.

But Orgreave did not come from nowhere. In Manchester 200 years ago this summer a peaceful rally in St Peter's Field of 60,000 pro-democracy reformers – men, women and children – was attacked by armed cavalry, leaving 15 dead and more than 600 injured. It remains the bloodiest political clash in British history.

The so-called “Battle of Orgreave” in 1984 and the St Peter's Field massacre in Manchester in 1819 stand beside many other historical examples where hundreds have been killed or injured by the state including the Peasants' Revolt of 1381, the Amritsar Massacre in India in 1919 and Bloody Sunday of Northern Ireland in 1972.

New, more restrictive laws were passed after both Peterloo and Orgreave, and in each case the state forces were congratulated by the government of the day for warding off what they called the threat of revolution. Both were ambushes planned by the state.

ORGREAVE

TRUTH AND JUSTICE CAMPAIGN



Other similarities between Peterloo and Orgreave include:

At Peterloo, named after the Battle of Waterloo, a huge crowd of between 60,000 and 70,000 peaceful and good-natured ordinary men, women and children were allowed to gather to demand the reform of parliamentary representation.

At Peterloo, the government and local businessmen were frightened of the power of organised labour and wanted to make sure that what had happened during the 1793 French revolution did not happen in England. They planned for a huge number of soldiers, cavalry and militia to attack the crowds.

At Peterloo, cavalry armed with swords killed 15 people and injured hundreds. They were not there to get the crowds to leave, but to kill and maim.

After Peterloo, the businessmen, army and militia were thanked by the Prince Regent for preserving public order and saving the nation.

At the Orgreave coking plant around 8,000 picketing miners, striking to protect their jobs and communities, were escorted into a field by police and shown where to stand. Again, the gathering was peaceful.

At Orgreave, the government planned to use thousands of police to attack the pickets and smash the unions in revenge for being defeated by the striking miners and other unions during the 1970s.

At Orgreave, pickets were attacked by police on horseback armed with long batons, and by police on foot using short batons. The aim was to brutally assault, injure and demoralise the miners.

After Orgreave when the strike ended, Chief Constables were invited for drinks at the Home Office with senior Conservative Government figures to be congratulated on defeating the miners and unions.

Whenever the State finds itself faced with large-scale protest it resorts to force, and then claims that there was no other way to deal with matters.

Those in power work to cover up the truth and build a false narrative after the event, with their allegations that troops or police had been attacked first enthusiastically taken up by the right-wing press and others.

Both the governments of 1819 and 1984 absolutely refused to have any form of Inquiry into their actions. And this current Conservative government continues to turn down the Orgreave Truth and Justice Campaign's call for an independent Public Inquiry, along with a request from the Bishop of Sheffield for an Orgreave Independent Panel.

We believe that the state-sanctioned actions that summer in 1984 have seriously undermined the confidence of the public in the police, especially in mining communities.

We are also puzzled why, if there is nothing to hide, this Conservative government is refusing to release certain key documents relating to what happened at Orgreave in 1984 until 2066.

This is why we must keep up the pressure for an inquiry and make sure that Orgreave is not just another state assault that passes into history, but that truth and justice prevails.

www.otjc.org.uk

Donate to the Campaign via PayPal link on our website

🐦 @orgreavejustice

📘 @OrgreaveTruthAndJusticeCampaign

📷 @orgreavetruthandjustice

June 2019