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# **Orgreave, Great Britain 1984 - Miners' strike: how the bloodiest battle became the 'biggest frame-up'**

Tuesday 16 April 2013, by [CONN David](#) (Date first published: 22 November 2012).

**Many miners suspect the South Yorkshire police operation at Orgreave in June 1984 was a trap, pre-planned for confrontation, co-ordinated for the courts. Now the IPCC is to probe claims of assault, perjury, perverting the course of justice and misconduct.**

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For almost 30 years the South Yorkshire police and the then Conservative government's version of the brutal, pivotal confrontation at the Orgreave coking plant has never been officially revised.

In Margaret Thatcher's description, the coal miners picketing the plant were "the enemy within". The police claimed the miners rioted on 18 June 1984 and that officers who were filmed beating miners with truncheons and charging on horses were only defending themselves. Despite the subsequent collapse in the prosecutions for riot against 95 miners, and South Yorkshire police's £425,000 payout to miners who consequently sued, neither the police nor the then Tory government has admitted any fault.

Now, following last month's BBC documentary and the Guardian's exposé in April of links between Orgreave and the 1989 Hillsborough disaster - both were policed by the same South Yorkshire force under the same chief constable, Peter Wright- the events at the coking plant are to be investigated by the Independent Police Complaints Commission. The present-day South Yorkshire police force has referred itself to the IPCC, with the commission explaining that allegations include assault, perjury, perverting the course of justice and misconduct in a public office.

The National Union of Mineworkers, and Michael Mansfield QC, who defended three of the Orgreave miners accused of riot and now acts for the Hillsborough Family Support group, are calling for the director of public prosecutions (DPP) to investigate in tandem with the IPCC, as is happening with inquiries into South Yorkshire police's alleged misconduct at, and after, Hillsborough.

## **'Crush the strike'**

"The miners were defending their livelihoods and communities against the closures of the pits and we believe this was a planned operation to crush the strike," said Chris Kitchen, the NUM's general

secretary. "Assault, perjury, perverting the course of justice and misconduct in a public office are all very serious criminal offences so we believe the DPP should stand behind the IPCC investigation."

Before the Orgreave confrontation, Wright planned to charge miners with riot, a charge which carried a potential life sentence, if police deemed that the circumstances justified it. In a report to his South Yorkshire county council police committee on 25 September 1985, Wright explained the decision was made, and a team of detectives appointed to collate evidence, following police officers' reports throughout May 1984 that miners were picketing violently at Orgreave.

"Discussions took place involving the chief constable, his senior staff and the county prosecuting solicitor," Wright wrote. "The chief constable decided that the usual charge of disorderly conduct ... was inadequate and that where appropriate charges of unlawful assembly and riot should be preferred."

On 18 June 1984, around 8,000 miners assembled for a mass picket called by the NUM and its then president, Arthur Scargill. South Yorkshire police now claim that 4,500 officers from different forces nationwide were there to police the coking plant.

Miners have always described their surprise they were not turned away by police that day, as was common during the year-long strike, but allowed to assemble close to the plant, before being ushered into a large field, where police were massed at the bottom. Kitchen, who was present as a 19-year-old striking miner, said it was a trap.

Bob Bird, a West Midlands officer who served at Orgreave in a short shield police support unit (PSU), told the Guardian he believed the plan was to inflict a significant defeat on the miners: "It would have been easy to turn people away, but the decision was taken to let them in. If you were to choose an area to defend, you would choose that site, and the police were decided: if there was to be a confrontation, we were not going to lose."

### **'Continuous barrage'**

The police account, both in the media on the day and during the trial the following year, was that the miners, unprovoked, had attacked police lines with sustained violence, throwing a continuous barrage of stones, and bottles, lengths of wood, metal objects and bricks.

Mansfield challenged the assertion in court, referring to the police film of the day, which showed miners, many with their shirts off, initially relaxing in the June sunshine. Generally, miners accept that some stones were thrown from the back - there are many accounts that senior miners told those throwing stones to stop. When the lorries carrying coke to British Steel at Scunthorpe left the plant the miners pushed at police lines, as was routine on picket lines. However, the police lines suddenly split, horses charged through, and the PSUs released.

One miner, Russell Broomhead, was filmed on television being beaten by a policeman just in front of the police lines.

"I was knocked over by a horse," recalls Broomhead, now 55, who worked at Houghton Main colliery near Barnsley. "Then a short shield policeman hit me, and as I was getting up, the next one attacked me. The police were out of control, and nobody has ever been held to account for what they did."

Suffering physical injuries and psychological trauma, Broomhead was arrested and charged with riot; he was to be tried in the second batch of the 95 prosecuted miners, until he was acquitted when

the first trial of 15 collapsed.

One of those 15, Stefan Wysocki, now 62, was arrested for allegedly throwing a stone, which he always denied. He says he was punched and kicked as he was led through the ranks of police officers after his arrest. Another, Arthur Critchlow, said he was hit over the head with a truncheon while attending to an elderly man on the ground. The officers who arrested Critchlow claimed he had been running backwards, tripped on the kerb and hit his head. Another charged miner, David Bell, sustained a broken leg. Bill Greenaway had his wrist fractured after, he claimed, it was hit with a truncheon.

Wysocki, held in a Rotherham police cell, was told late that night he was to be charged with riot.

"I still cannot explain how that felt," he said. "It was unbelievable, that it was happening in this country. It was extremely stressful. But we believed we were going to prison, because they wanted to make an example of us."

At the trial, the miners were alleged in very similar terms to have been clearly identified as throwing stones at the police. In each case two police officers had made a statement, and testified in court, that they had witnessed the incident and made the arrest.

### **Police statements**

Copies of police statements obtained by the BBC for last month's Inside Out documentary reveal that dozens contained identical descriptions of a riot. And the statements of the two officers relating to each individual miner are almost word for word the same.

Wright told his police committee that several officers had parts of their statements dictated by South Yorkshire detectives at the scene. However, he said the detectives only "assisted" with "local knowledge and detail" and that "there was nothing sinister in this procedure. Evidence had to be collated."

Bob Bird, a West Midlands officer, and Norman Taylor, a Northumbria officer also on duty that day, have confirmed that they do not recall large parts of their statements being dictated. Bird said the two arresting officers handwrote their statements quickly, about the individual arrest, with little preamble. At that time, he and other officers told the Guardian, it was common practice to compare notes and make statements together.

South Yorkshire police then typed the handwritten statements up centrally. It was at that stage, Bird concluded, that they must have incorporated the very similar general introduction, describing the violence by miners. Bird's statement, identical to that of his fellow arresting officer, included the phrases: "A continuous stream of missiles came from the pickets"; "there were broken bottles, bits of masonry and telegraph wire strewn across the road."

Bird said he never saw or signed his typed statement - the miner that he arrested was not in the first batch of 15 prosecutions. He said he did not believe it was improper for such a general description to be written into the officers' statements centrally by South Yorkshire police, if the description was accurate. Although he questioned the wider political conflict between the miners and the government into which he believed the police were drawn, Bird said that miners were throwing stones that day, that "it was an unlawful assembly," and that he stood by the arrest that he made. It was, however, the decision of South Yorkshire police to decide on charges of riot.

The prosecution fell apart after 48 days of police evidence, challenged by Mansfield and other defence barristers. Some officers' oral evidence differed from their written statements. The defence had collated photographs from many sources, and used it to argue that officers' evidence was inaccurate, and that several who claimed to have arrested men had not even been at the scene.

One officer who had apparently signed the statement of his fellow officer was challenged by barrister Vera Baird (later a QC and Labour minister) that it was not his handwriting. Baird requested a handwriting expert to analyse the statement - over lunch, it went missing. A copy was analysed by a Home Office expert who concluded the signature had not been written by the same officer.

## Acquitted

All 15 miners were acquitted on 17 July 1985, when the prosecution offered no further evidence. Mansfield called it "the biggest frame-up ever". The South Yorkshire police committee were concerned that, at the very least, the allegations of a forged signature and dictated statements "amounted to inaccurate perjured evidence". However, Chief Constable Wright insisted the police action was justified.

The miners sued for assault, wrongful arrest and malicious prosecution, and in June 1991, South Yorkshire police paid £425,000 in damages. The settlement was reached before the discovery stage, at which internal police documents would have been disclosed. South Yorkshire police has never admitted liability, no investigation was ever announced with not one officer disciplined for any offence.

Ian Lavery, Labour MP for Wansbeck and a former NUM president, argues the IPCC investigation should consider the policing of the miners' strike more widely. "The general perception all these years has been that miners attacked the police. In fact, terrible wrongs were done for which nobody has been held to account. There is still huge resentment within former mining communities. We need the truth about what happened, not just at Orgreave."

In a statement, South Yorkshire police said it had "demonstrated openness and transparency" in referring the Orgreave events for investigation, almost 30 years after the bloodiest day in the miners' strike.

The IPCC said it "must now assess the information ... to determine how the matter should be dealt with".

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**P.S.**

\* guardian.co.uk, Thursday 22 November 2012 13.14 GMT:

<http://www.guardian.co.uk/politics/2012/nov/22/miners-strike-orgreave-bloodiest-battle>