

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”.

A south England TV company has taken a controlling stake in two northern TV stations.

That's TV, which operates six stations in the South East, will merge with YourTV, which holds licenses for Manchester, and Blackpool and Preston.

YourTV won the Ofcom licenses for the hyperlocal stations in the North West in February and March 2013 and was given a two-year deadline to air.

As the deadline came close, and following what YourTV programme director Nicholas Wheeler described as "a few near misses", the company approached That's TV and agreed it would take a controlling stake in the company.

Media regulator Ofcom approved a delayed launch date for the Manchester station last week and is in talks about extending the Preston and Blackpool license.

Ofcom said YourTV remains the successful applicant for the two North West licenses but Wheeler said: "The license is now owned by the new company of which we remain a small shareholder... I wouldn't want to give a false impression."

Ofcom itself admitted last year that it is very unlikely all

TV station takeover

local stations will survive. But Wheeler insists the merger is positive news for the stations, with the Manchester one set to launch by June.

Wheeler said YourTV had faced difficulties since winning the license and did not have the backing of a larger organisation.

'Negative attention'

"The economic climate plus negative attention from other competing media meant it didn't come together," he said.

"At the last minute we had discussions with That's TV, which has committed to a very similar format, very similar programming commitments, a very similar news service, so good news for Manchester."

He claimed new ownership would not undermine the local nature of the content to be provided by the newly branded That's Manchester and That's Lancashire.

"That is a requirement of Ofcom and it won't be compromised," he said.

Wheeler added that That'sTV is looking for premises in Manchester and advertising

for staff. He also insisted that content will not be shared across That's TV's stations unless it has a strong local relevance.

Local viewers

"YourTV's philosophy, which is shared by That's TV, is that to compete against other stations by showing similar content later won't work," he said. "We will create content that is currently not on television and cover issues that are currently not covered and are absolutely relevant to Manchester."

A spokesperson from media regulator Ofcom said: "YourTV has confirmed its commitment to delivering all the local programming, news and current affairs for Manchester set out when it applied for the licence."

"These programming proposals undermined Ofcom's decision to award the licence to YourTV Manchester. We are in discussions with YourTV with a view to the channel launching and meeting the needs of local viewers."

ANTONIA CHARLESWORTH

having a conviction for violence when they themselves were the victim of that violence."

He added that Unison has members who work in schools and are foster parents. Where a foster child has a conviction it is also leading to the school worker being suspended.

Ben Thomas, national officer for Unison, said Unison is committed to the safeguarding of children but that DfE's guidance has resulted in hundreds of innocent staff being suspended from schools.

Bradley added that the government has "botched" the guidance and has not been clear on who it applies to, leading schools to seek disclosures from staff who are not covered by the legislation.

Dhillon too emphasised the need to make child protection a priority but said there is an urgent need for greater clarity, including a comprehensive list detailing the offences that are covered and those that are exempt.

A DfE spokesperson said: "Nothing is more important than keeping children safe and schools should ensure this is paramount in everything they do. These are not new requirements and the law has not changed. Schools and governing bodies should use their judgement when deciding which school staff are covered and, where it is deemed necessary, take action."

KELLY MATTISON



NEWS IN BRIEF

CHARITY ART RAFFLE

A Harrogate gallery is hosting an art raffle in aid of a charity fighting Ebola. RedHouse Originals Gallery will raffle off pieces by musicians and artists including Goldie, Gered Mankowitz, Dudley Edwards and Pete Doherty for Médecins Sans Frontières, the international medical humanitarian organisation, which provides aid in nearly 80 countries. The artwork is on display until 23 March and raffle tickets cost £10 (see <http://bit.ly/1Gw4t0J>).

CUMBRIA CATS

Wild lynx could be reintroduced to a private estate in the Lake District. The Lynx UK Trust is launching a consultation to gauge opinion on bringing the big cats to a site in Ennerdale, the BBC reports. The National Farmers Union has raised concerns about the impact of the animals on forest ecosystems. The project would see six lynx, extinct in the UK, wearing tracking devices at four sites across the UK.

FRACKING EXPANSION

Fracking in the North West looks set to expand following a £138 million investment from Swiss chemicals company Ineos in UK shale firm IGas, which holds licenses along the Mersey and Dee estuaries. Ineos aims to become the biggest player in the UK shale gas industry and to overcome public objection it will offer communities 6 per cent of the revenue it produces.

WRITING COMPETITION

The Liverpool writing competition responsible for getting local authors noticed by major publishers is open for entries. Pulp Idol focuses on new and original novelists, providing a platform and networking opportunities. Former winner James Rice signed a two book deal for his debut novel *Alice and the Fly*. For further information email info@writingonthewall.org, uk, tel 0151 703 0020 or enter at www.writingonthewall.org.uk.

led

Surinder Dhillon, an employment lawyer at Irwin Mitchell, said the regulations were brought in for childminders and day nurseries in 2009 but at the end of last year the government said they also apply to primary schools.

She said that as a result staff are being asked to complete disclosure forms and in some cases are immediately suspended if a member of their household has committed a disqualifiable offence.

According to Unison, staff are being suspended for issues unrelated to child safety.

Keith Bradley, Unison North West lead for schools, said: "We have instances where a member of school staff has been suspended due to their partner

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