

Report on Hillsborough football disaster exposes “biggest cover-up in British legal history”

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More than 23 years since the April 15, 1989 Hillsborough football stadium disaster in Sheffield, England took the lives of 96 Liverpool Football Club supporters, a report by the Hillsborough Independent Panel has confirmed that their deaths were the result of police and corporate negligence.

The tragedy at the stadium’s Leppings Lane end resulted in the greatest loss of life ever recorded at a sporting event in Britain. Hundreds of fans were also injured and thousands more traumatised for life by the events.

The men, women and children were crushed to death after police gave the order to open Gate C at 2.52 p.m., just before kick-off. As a result, hundreds of fans were directed into two already dangerously overcrowded “pens” where 94 were to die. Two others died later, one following two days in the hospital and a second, Tony Bland, in March, 1993, after being in a persistent vegetative state since the disaster.

The Panel’s report, issued Wednesday, is a devastating blow to what Michael Mansfield, the legal representative of the Hillsborough Family Support Group, described as “the biggest cover-up in British legal history”.

From the first moments of the unfolding disaster, the police and political establishment, with the active collaboration of the media, led by Rupert Murdoch’s *The Sun* tabloid, worked to ensure that those individuals and organisations whose actions resulted in the deaths, were allowed to get off scot-free.

They conspired to concoct a pack of lies in order to shift the blame onto so-called “drunken” Liverpool supporters who they claimed had charged the gate leading to the terraces. Such an event never occurred.

Indeed, live TV footage showed fans doing all they could to help the dying and injured, including breaking apart advertising hoardings to use as stretchers to carry the injured to safety, as police officers looked on.

The Sun ran a now notorious front page article headlined “The Truth,” in which it slandered Liverpool fans, claiming that they had stolen from the dead and urinated on police trying to help the dying and injured.

The truth, as presented in the Panel document, is that these lies were based on a local news agency report of a conversation with the then MP for Sheffield Hallam, Irvine Patnick and a senior police officer.

For more than two decades, successive Conservative and Labour governments continued the cover-up.

It was only the determined campaign by the Hillsborough Families Support Group, the Hillsborough Justice Campaign and their supporters that have enabled the real truth of events to emerge.

In response to widespread anger at the cover-up, and the failure to hold anyone to account, the then Labour government established the Hillsborough Independent Panel in January 2010 and agreed to release previously confidential documents surrounding the disaster.

Over the past 18 months, the Hillsborough Independent Panel scrutinised over 450,000 pages of material related to Hillsborough, of which 335,000 pages have been published on their web site. They include records from the South Yorkshire Police, Sheffield City Council, the South Yorkshire coroner and the fire and ambulance services.

The 394 page report, “Hillsborough: The Report of the Hillsborough Independent Panel”, is available here.

It reveals that the Football Association selected the Hillsborough ground as the semifinal venue despite it

not having a valid safety certificate and despite two previous incidents—during FA Cup semifinals in 1981 and 1987—when the games had to be delayed due to crowd congestion at the stadium.

The report also discredits the actions of South Yorkshire West District Coroner, Dr Stefan Popper, who ruled in 1991 that those who died had already received their critical injuries by 3:15 p.m., so evidence beyond that point was not required as to the cause of death. This resulted in no evidence ever being heard regarding the role of the police and failings of the emergency services after that time.

Instead, Dr Bill Kirkup, the medical advisor to the panel said there was evidence that 41 people “had the potential to survive after the period of 3:15... the potential was of that order of magnitude”.

Refuting the official lies, the report finds, “There was clear evidence from the postmortem reports that 28 of those who died did not have traumatic asphyxia with obstruction of the blood circulation, and asphyxia may have taken significantly longer to be fatal.”

Separate evidence also revealed that the heart and lungs of 31 victims had continued to function after the crush and that this was for a prolonged period in 16 of the cases.

The report documents efforts by the police and others to pervert the course of justice by doctoring statements. Some 164 statements made by police officers about events that day, were amended. Of these 116 were substantially changed to remove or alter “unfavourable” comments regarding the policing of the match. Complicit in the alterations were senior officers including then South Yorkshire Chief Superintendent Donald Denton and then-chief constable of the force, Peter Wright.

In section 2.11.84 on page 326, the report reveals a short, undated note later issued to police officers with guidance on how to complete their statements. It states “no CRITICISMS” (capitals in original) should be “levelled at anyone in the text of your summary”. It added, there should be “no mention of the word CHAOTIC or any of its derivatives”. These requests were the “express wish” of a Detective Inspector King, the document states.

In total, 23 police officers had references to “chaos”, “fear”, “panic” and “confusion” altered or deleted from their original recollections. The South Yorkshire

Metropolitan Ambulance Service also altered 54 of the 101 statements produced by its own employees.

Such is the damning, unanswerable exposure of the naked deceit and criminality exposed, that all three main political parties in the UK have been forced to go on record to endorse its findings.

However, in his House of Commons statement, Conservative Prime Minister David Cameron sought to absolve previous governments, including the Conservative government of Prime Minister Margaret Thatcher in power at the time, from any involvement in the cover-up. He said that “having been through every document—and every government document including Cabinet Minutes will be published—the Panel found no evidence of any government trying to conceal the truth.”

In fact, the documents revealed by the Panel were withheld for two decades precisely to prevent the truth from coming to light. For example, it has been known since February 1999, due to a newspaper leak, that more than 100 police officers’ statements were altered.

The Labour Party played a critical role in the cover-up. In 1998 it appointed a senior judge, Lord Justice Smith to “scrutinise the evidence” available. Smith’s subsequent report adhered rigidly to the official, lying version of events, defended the role of the South Yorkshire police and blamed the Liverpool supporters for their own deaths.



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