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Public Inquiry Announced into Orgreave Clash During 1984 Miners' Strike

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The UK government has confirmed it will launch a public inquiry into the infamous “Battle of Orgreave,” a violent clash between police and striking coal miners in 1984. The incident, regarded as a turning point in Britain’s industrial history, played a pivotal role in reshaping the country’s economic and labour landscape under the leadership of then-Prime Minister Margaret Thatcher’s Conservative government.

The confrontation occurred on 18 June 1984 at the Orgreave Coking Plant in South Yorkshire, as tensions peaked during a nationwide miners' strike. The dispute, led by the National Union of Mineworkers (NUM), opposed the closure of more than 20 coal pits and the potential loss of 20,000 jobs. That day, hundreds of officers were deployed to prevent miners from disrupting coal deliveries, leading to violent scenes that left more than 120 individuals injured on both sides.

The year-long strike marked a watershed moment in the struggle between the government and union power, with the NUM ultimately suffering a major defeat. At the time, roughly 180,000 individuals worked in the coal industry. Today, the sector has virtually vanished from the UK, with no active deep coal mines remaining.

The new inquiry will examine the conduct of South Yorkshire Police during the event, particularly in light of longstanding allegations of excessive force, wrongful arrests, and questionable legal procedures. Calls for accountability have persisted for decades, with campaigners arguing that the state overstepped its authority in an attempt to quash legitimate industrial action.

While the full scope of the inquiry has yet to be outlined, the decision to revisit Orgreave comes amid growing pressure to scrutinise historic examples of state-police relations with working communities. For many, this is not just about the events of one day; it symbolises a broader shift in British economic policy during the 1980s, from nationalised industries and union influence to liberalisation and privatisation.

The upcoming review will not reassess the broader political context of the miners' strike, nor reverse its outcome. However, it may shed light on the operational decisions made by police leadership and offer a measure of long-delayed transparency for those affected.

This long-overdue step acknowledges that even in times of national change, the rule of law and individual rights must remain paramount. While the UK has moved far from its coal-dependent past, the legacy of Orgreave remains a poignant reminder of the social costs associated with economic reform.