

Press Release - Hillsborough Cover-up Settlement

601 Hillsborough victims secure settlement of civil claims over police cover-up

Over 600 victims of one of the largest and most shameful cover-ups by a police force in history have finally achieved the settlement of their civil claims brought against the South Yorkshire Police and the West Midlands Police. The claims related only to damage caused by the cover-up and not the disaster itself. These claims were started in September 2015, with an agreement to settle finally being reached at the end of April this year. The settlement could not be made public until the conclusion of the recent trial of two police officers and a solicitor last week. The settlement has established a scheme by which the Defendants will pay damages to compensate each Claimant for the injuries they have suffered as well as access to a treatment fund for any further psychiatric treatment or counselling they require. Where a Claimant has died (as is sadly the case for several victims) the compensation will be paid to their estate.

Through this civil claim for misfeasance in a public office 601 victims sought justice and accountability for the deliberate, orchestrated and thoroughly dishonest police cover-up that suppressed the truth about the responsibility of the police and blamed the football supporters for the horrific events that unfolded at the Hillsborough Stadium on 15 April 1989. 96 Liverpool supporters were unlawfully killed as a result of the police failings that day, and countless others suffered physical and psychological harm. The distress and heartache caused by the loss of life, and the injuries caused to those who survived, were made significantly worse by the lies told and the cover-up that followed. As a result of the cover-up, that was maintained for nearly 30 years, the victims, both the bereaved and the survivors, and their families and loved ones, suffered additional psychiatric injury. No amount of money can compensate them for the ordeal they have suffered but this settlement acknowledges both the cover-up and its impact upon each of the victims.

The settlement of these claims marks the end of an unparalleled and extraordinary fight for justice by the victims and their families. They have had to fight hard, overcome numerous hurdles and stand up to powerful bodies in order to have the record put right and for the truth to be uncovered. This is a fight they should never have had to undertake.

As this protracted struggle comes to an end, the fact that the truth could be and was suppressed for so long, despite independent inquests and inquiries, requires the most careful of consideration and deep reflection. After the Taylor inquiry in 1989 cleared the fans of any responsibility for the disaster, South Yorkshire Police sought to rewrite history. It took until 2012 and the publication of the report of the Hillsborough Independent Panel for the lid to finally be lifted on the depth and extent of the cover-up. The findings of the Panel formed the basis for an apology to the victims and families by the then Chief Constable of South Yorkshire Police, David Crompton. On 12 September 2012 he accepted that there had been a high-level dishonest cover-up by South Yorkshire Police officers, and that the police failed the victims and families and lost control. He said:

“In the immediate aftermath senior officers sought to change the record of events. Disgraceful lies were told which blamed the Liverpool fans for the disaster. Statements were altered which sought to minimise the police blame. These actions have caused untold pain and distress for over 23 years. I am profoundly sorry for the way the Force failed on 15th April 1989 and I am doubly sorry for the injustice that followed and I apologise to the families of the 96 and Liverpool fans”.

On the same day, the then Prime Minister, David Cameron MP, told the House of Commons that:

“the families have long believed that some of the authorities attempted to create a completely unjust account of events that sought to blame the fans for what happened... the families were right.”

Later that year the High Court quashed the original inquest verdicts and ordered new inquests. In doing so, the Lord Chief Justice also highlighted the “*campaign*” which had been mounted over decades to blame the fans and deny the culpability of the police: “*Notwithstanding its falsity the tendency to blame the fans was disappointingly tenacious and it lingered on for many years.*”

This tendency to blame the fans resurfaced during the fresh inquests in Warrington, heard between March 2014 and April 2016, in the longest case ever heard before a jury in Britain. Despite the then Chief Constable of South Yorkshire Police making the public statement in September 2012 accepting that there had been a high-level cover-up, the families of those that died still had to fight hard, and once again had to disprove the lies at the new Hillsborough Inquests. The inquest jury rejected the lies, making clear findings that the 96 deceased had been unlawfully killed, that South Yorkshire Police had failed in multiple ways in both the planning and the handling of events on the

match day, and that there was no behaviour on the part of football supporters which caused or contributed to the deaths.

Criminal prosecutions eventually followed but failed to secure accountability either for the disaster itself or the cover-up that followed. Shamefully there has here been an almost complete failure of the justice system to deliver justice. Questions need to be asked as to why. Action needs to be taken urgently to stop such a lack of accountability ever happening again.

It has even been suggested in the last few days that there was no cover-up. This has caused profound distress to many bereaved families and survivors. The cover-up was detailed by the Hillsborough Independent Panel in September 2012, its existence was accepted by the then Chief Constable of the South Yorkshire Police, acknowledged by the then Prime Minister David Cameron, and by the Lord Chief Justice of the High Court. The Inquest jury in the 2014-2016 inquests found that the behaviour of the fans did not contribute to the deaths of the 96.

We trust that this settlement will put an end to any fresh attempts to rewrite the record and wrongly claim that there was no cover-up. In so commenting, we contrast the dignity of the bereaved families and the supporters, with the conduct of those who still seek to peddle the discredited lies of the past.

It is time now to look forward and for the hard-fought achievements of the victims to result in lasting change. It is time for public bodies to be required to tell the truth, for a duty of candour to be imposed upon them and for bereaved families to have adequate public funding to enable them to be effectively represented at an inquiry or inquest into the death of their relatives. In the aftermath of the 2014-2016 inquests the families wanted to leave a legacy – real change – which would prevent what happened to them, ever being repeated. The Public Authority (Accountability) Bill 2017 (“Hillsborough Law”) was sponsored by MPs from almost all parties – the Conservatives, Labour, Liberal Democrats, SNP, Plaid Cymru, SDLP and the Greens, and had its first reading in the House of Commons unopposed. Its progress was halted by the 2017 General Election and neither government since has seen fit to put it back on the parliamentary agenda. Given the lack of justice delivered on the current state of the law, it is urgent that this law is now enacted.

Behind every one of these claims is a personal tragedy, an individual story to be told. It is for the victims to tell their own stories. But each and every one affected by the events of 15 April 1989 deserves at the very least that, this time, never again means never again.

Saunders Law are the Lead Solicitors appointed by the court in the Group Litigation on behalf of the 601 Claimants and represent 219 of those Claimants in their individual claims, following the police cover-up in connection with the Hillsborough Tragedy. A list of all the firms representing Claimants is provided below. We are pleased to announce that this large, Group Litigation, has now settled.

For further information, please contact Nia Williams (Partner) of Saunders Law on 020 7632 4300 or by email at niawilliams@saunders.co.uk.

The other firms representing Claimants in the litigation are as follows:

- **Broudie Jackson Canter representing 215 Claimants**
- **Birnberg Peirce representing 106 Claimants**
- **Hodge Jones and Allen representing 35 Claimants**
- **Edwin Coe representing 18 Claimants**
- **Taylor Rose MW representing 3 Claimants**
- **ITN Solicitors representing 2 Claimants**
- **Gardner Croft representing 1 Claimant**
- **Irvings Law representing 1 Claimant**
- **Maxwell Hodge representing 1 Claimant**