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Ten Short Years

Beginning a six page feature on the tenth anniversary of the deaths of 96 Liverpool fans at Hillsborough, John Williams assesses the issues arising from the day of the disaster.

IS IT REALLY TEN YEARS? I HAVE TO SAY IT SEEMS LIKE FEWER to me though, God knows, it must seem like a life sentence to people still struggling to find out what happened to their lost loved ones after they were waved off, catastrophically as it turned out, simply to see a football match in Sheffield on the morning of April 15th 1989. For those who have followed the case – and in Liverpool, even now, Hillsborough is seldom ever really off the public agenda – certain key phrases about the inquiry hearings have now taken on an almost totemic resonance: “the 3.15 pm cut-off point”; “accidental death”; “defective camera 5”; “missing video tapes” and so on.

TV coverage has also put some of these in the national domain; it is incredible just how many people seemed to know so little of the important detail of the incidents in Sheffield until the recent drama-doc hit

home. That is why, of course, Jimmy McGovern’s campaigning film was so important. None of this has been put to bed, either, by the blame allocated to, and now apparently accepted by, the South Yorkshire police, or by Jack Straw’s recent judicial scrutiny of the evidence which was chaired by another High Court Judge (aren’t they just the guys to get to the bottom of this?) Lord Justice Stuart-Smith. The latter could find no reason to open a new inquiry, much to the obvious disgust of the Hillsborough Family Support Group.

With no individuals yet held accountable and no police officers prosecuted or disciplined, we now move on to the private prosecutions of key police officers by the families. Much as one would like to say differently, there seems likely to be no satisfactory end to this, one of the reasons why Straw is also examining the verdicts available to inquests, the rules on early retirement

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