



Sorry Seems To Be The Hardest Word
by **Denis Joe**

It is a strange world that we are living in. Children are encouraged to tell their parents off for smoking or drinking alcohol. There is discussion about lowering the voting age to 16. Conversely, adults are treated more and more like children. Nowhere else is this more noticeable than the forced apology. In 2007 Tony Blair apologised to the Irish people for the potato famine. In 2008 the then Prime Minister Kevin Rudd formally apologised to all Aborigines for laws and policies that "inflicted profound grief, suffering and loss". David Cameron has apologised for not sounding a warning over the economic crisis in 2008 and for Section 28 in 2009. Then as prime minister he made an apology for Bloody Sunday in 2010, then apologised for Hillsborough and the murder of the Belfast solicitor Pat Finucane an act carried out with collusion from the British state.

In the past week or so the Labour party feel that they have found an issue that they can really embarrass the Conservatives with. The recent release of Whitehall papers showing a secret plan to close 75 pits and that the Thatcher government considered deploying troops at the height of the strike, has gotten the Labour Party excited and allowing them to appear radical

and even left wing. Though some Labour MPs were nervous about the Party appearing to exonerate Arthur Scargill.

It was left to Lisa Nandy, the Labour MP for Wigan, to raise the issue, during Prime Minister's Question Time, to call on David Cameron to apologise to the families of the miners. But once Cameron had huffed and puffed and refused to apologise it then became a cause which the rest of the Labour Party could get behind. Shadow Cabinet Office minister, Michael Dugher waded in demanding that ministers to set out 'all details of the interactions between the Government and the police at the time'. As with all crusades there is a campaign body, 'Justice For The Coalfields' which is backing the Orgreave Truth and Justice Campaign in calling for a public inquiry, as is the fashion these days.

Dugher later appeared on BBC Two's Daily Politics (30/01/2014) calling for transparency concerning the pressure that the government of the day, put on the police as well as a proper investigation as to what happened at Orgreave so there can be reconciliation and Justice. The Conservative MP Andrew Rosindel, who was also on the programme agreed that there should be transparency about what happened at that period, going on to say that it was a political battle and that the communities were being used by Arthur Scargill.

Daily Politics presenter Jo Coburn raised an interesting point when she said to Dugher that there was economic change and that there were plans to close uneconomic pit. She then asked what the point in raking over it now is. And that is very pertinent. It does seem as if politicians and left wing activists are fighting battles that were fought and lost three decades ago.

In one sense we can see that this is following a trend of pulling the past into the present, comparing events that happened decades ago with today's 'values', in the same manner that the accusations against 60s and 70s pop personalities and the uproar over abuse in music schools, is an attempt to measure those days using contemporary mores.

Each side indulges in the 'blame game': whether it's Scargill, Kinnock or Thatcher. It allows each side to get on their high horse and for some, on the left, it offers the comfort of nostalgia, a time when the working class were prepared to stand up to the government. But is there a point to all this. Will a public inquiry into events at Orgreave (which many of us old lefties know about what occurred there. It was hardly a state secret) really make a tack of difference to those families that were involved in the strike?

Does it have any relevance for us today?

This is the politics of the playground. When some kid hits another the teacher comes along and demands that the kid apologise. But we, as adults, know that it is a hollow gesture, we hold to the thought that the child will understand that they have done wrong and will be more considerate in future.

Yet the demands for apologies these days cannot even serve that purpose. The days of industrial disputes on the scale of the miners' strike (or even GCHQ) are not something that is going to occur again. There really are no lessons to be drawn from past industrial disputes. To say otherwise is not only dishonest but also show the cowardliness of the political class, in that they refuse to face up to the problems of today.