

Hillsborough Disaster

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🕒 5.42pm

Steve Rotheram >
(Liverpool, Walton) (Lab)

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I beg to move,

That this House calls for the full disclosure of all Government-related documents, including Cabinet minutes, relating to the 1989 Hillsborough disaster; requires that such documentation be uncensored and without redaction; and further calls for the families of the 96 and the Hillsborough Independent Panel to have unrestricted access to that information.

I thank the Backbench Business Committee for granting today's debate, following the incredible response to the Government online petition, which attracted 140,000 signatures in just a couple of weeks. It is because those people took the time to push the Government for the release of the Hillsborough documents that today we have the first ever parliamentary debate resulting from an e-petition—although, after a fight for justice which has lasted 22 years, even that minor concession was called into question following last week's shenanigans in the Chamber.

I also thank colleagues for their fantastic support and response: almost 100 MPs from nine separate political parties supported our application to the Backbench Business Committee. This is a victory for democracy and a victory for people power, but it remains to be seen whether it will be a victory for the families. They have been let down so many times that they will not be surprised if there are those who would prefer for this simply to go away. For those who foolishly believe that that might be the outcome of today's debate, let me make it absolutely clear: this issue will never just go away—not until there is justice for the 96.

During this debate, I will set out why I believe it is an important issue for this House to consider, albeit a bit late in the day, and outline why it is essential to press the Government on their commitment to release all papers relating to the Hillsborough disaster. All parts of the House should agree to the terms of the motion, but if they do not I intend to press the House to a vote. My hope is that common sense, and ultimately justice, will prevail.

I want to begin by setting out the context to the disaster, as there is a fundamental misunderstanding of what happened on 15 April 1989 and in the dark days, weeks, years and, ashamedly, decades that followed. There have been only a few occasions in my life when I have been completely overwhelmed by the emotion of the event that I was witnessing—the birth of my three wonderful children, the death of my beloved mum, and the loss of close friends and relatives. However, there is one other event that will live with me for the rest of my life, and that is the tragedy at Sheffield on that beautiful spring day 22 years, six months and two days ago.

Before 1989, Hillsborough was just the name of one of England's famous old football grounds, but for the past two decades the word "Hillsborough" has evoked memories of Britain's worst ever sporting disaster. It was a day when I helplessly watched frantic scenes as people who had travelled to see a football match, some mere children, lay injured and dying as they were pulled from the terraces. I was one of the lucky ones that day, and all my close friends and members of my family returned home, although for one—our GRO-A—it was touch and go whether she would survive. Thankfully, she did. This, unfortunately, was not the case for 96 men, women and children who were killed, and for hundreds of others injured and left permanently traumatised. The loss of 96 innocent lives was bad enough, but the tragic nature of their deaths was exacerbated by what happened next. Instead of those at fault taking responsibility for their actions, a co-ordinated campaign began to shift the blame and look for scapegoats. To this day, nobody has been held to account for Hillsborough.

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A half-day debate, though welcomed, is not long enough to go into all the details of this gross 22-year injustice, so I will concentrate on the three main pillars of the accusations against Liverpool fans—namely, that thousands turned up late and ticketless, were drunk and aggressive, and broke down a gate, causing a catastrophic crush. Is it any wonder that some people have doubtful and distorted views as to the exact cause of the disaster when misinformation began almost immediately after the players were led off the pitch at 3.6 pm? The BBC and ITV news, that very afternoon, misreported what had occurred, and it is important to understand the effect that this had, as it formed the immediate public perception of Hillsborough. To understand fully what I mean, people will need to suspend their predisposition to believe the Hillsborough myths and listen to tonight's debate with an open mind before jumping to conclusions. However, the faux pas committed in the immediate aftermath, when there was much uncertainty and a degree of confusion, pales into insignificance when one considers the malicious manner in which some sections of the press reported things, which still clouds thinking today.

At 3.15 pm, Graham Kelly, the then chief executive of the Football Association, went to the police control box, where he was told by the now-discredited match commander that Liverpool fans had rushed the gate into the ground, creating the fatal crush in the central pens. This was cowardice and deceit of the highest order, as the fact was that no gate had been rushed and that Duckenfield, the match commander, himself had personally ordered the gate to be opened. That disgraceful lie set the tone for all that came later. At 4.15 pm, Kelly was interviewed by the BBC, and he told them that the police had implied to him that the gate had been broken down by fans to gain access. Notwithstanding the fact that there was absolutely no basis to these lies, Kelly allowed himself to be embroiled in this treachery, although he may simply have wished this version of events to be true, as by then he probably realised that the dysfunctional organisation that he headed up would, quite rightly, be criticised for its part in the unfolding disaster. Why did the FA not listen? I suppose we will never know. Without any evidence to back them up, those lies were reported by some news organisations and the story was flashed across the world as fact, repeating the line that drunken Liverpool fans had forced the gate open.

Just a few days later, before people had even had time to arrange funerals for their loved ones, *The Sun* newspaper infamously printed the banner headline, "The Truth", on the personal instruction of its editor, Kelvin MacKenzie. It claimed that drunken fans had forced the gates open because they did not have match tickets, stolen from the corpses lying around the pitch, assaulted police officers and the emergency services, robbed cameras and other equipment from press photographers, and urinated on police officers who were helping the victims. That was one of the cruellest blows.

Column 664

It beggars belief that certain sections of the media still give air time to this most despicable man to vent his bile and mendacity. Given what he said about the Prime Minister the other day, even some Tories may now agree that this man is a pariah, as we on Merseyside know him to be. This is a man who preaches about free speech, but who dehumanised the deaths of 96 people for a cheap headline—what an absolute hypocrite!

Months later, the rag that that man edited admitted that the allegations it had made were totally false, but the damage had been done. To this day, the people of Merseyside do not buy that paper. It has taken the hackgate allegations about Murdoch's News International for people at long last to sit up and take notice of the claims that we made 22 years ago and to think that there may be some truth to our allegations of collusion between the press, certain politicians and the police.

The actual loss of life from Hillsborough will never be known. Yes, we know that 96 people died as a direct result of the injuries that they sustained at the stadium, but many have died subsequently. Some have died, tragically, by committing suicide and others have simply died of a broken heart at the loss of their loved ones. However, I have been careful not to base my account of events on emotion. I have ensured that I have clear and referenced evidence to support all my contentions.

It is claimed that truth is the first casualty of war; the same can be said of Hillsborough. Misdirection, obfuscation and damned lies were all used as smokescreens to deflect attention away from the guilty. Institutional complacency and gross negligence, coupled with an establishment cover-up, have added to the sense that there was an orchestrated campaign to shift blame from those who were really responsible on to the shoulders of Liverpool fans. Many myths have been perpetrated about the events of 15 April 1989. Perhaps those will be addressed only when the Hillsborough independent panel, set up by my right hon. Friend the Member for Leigh (Andy Burnham), concludes its deliberations and reports back next year. It is important to give the panel all the pieces of the jigsaw so that it can complete a full and accurate picture of events.

So what are the facts about the Hillsborough disaster? I say to those who believe that it was simply caused by fans turning up late, you are wrong. You are wrong. In spite of a misprint on tickets requesting that fans turn up at 2.45 and despite the fact that Liverpool fans had only 23 dilapidated turnstiles through which to enter the ground, while Forest fans had access through 60, half of the 10,100 supporters were already in the ground before 2.30. There was congestion outside and with 5,000 supporters still to enter the ground at 2.30, it was obvious that the kick-off needed to be delayed. Anyone who has ever been to a match knows that there is always a higher entry rate as kick-off time approaches. Two years previously, there had been a delayed kick-off to allow fans to get into the ground, but not this time.

Instead, the response to the build-up in congestion outside was to open a gate and allow fans on to the concourse. That had disastrous consequences as there were no stewards or police officers inside to direct supporters into the half-empty pens and away from the packed central pens. Signage was poor and the design of the Leppings Lane end meant that about 2,000 of that group made their way into the ground and headed straight for a tunnel marked "Standing", which led directly to pens 3 and 4. That influx caused severe crushing and some fans began climbing over the lateral fences into the half-empty pens on either side to escape. It was later estimated that more than 3,000 supporters were admitted to the central pens—almost double the safe capacity. At five minutes past 3, a crash barrier gave way in pen 3, causing people to fall on top of each other. Cries to the police for help were audible, but they went unheard.

Another falsehood is the claim that these were ticketless fans. Even officers at the turnstiles rejected that. The Health and Safety Executive, which later analysed the evidence of everyone who entered at that end, concluded that the total number was between 9,373 and 10,124. The capacity was 10,100. The myth of ticketless fans can therefore also be dispelled. To confirm that and to leave no doubt, the Taylor report stated that there was no substance to the allegation that ticketless fans caused the disaster. Unfortunately, that smear still impairs and prejudices the thinking of some, because they have heard the apocryphal tale of ticketless fans so many times that they believe it to be true. Not only is it untrue; it is total rubbish. It is the sort of nonsense bandied around by those who are desperate to protect their own skins.

 [Column 665](#)


And how about the outrageous claims by Bernard Ingham, Mrs Thatcher's press secretary? While the death toll was still rising, he stated that the cause was drunken fans and that Hillsborough would not have happened

"if a mob, clearly tanked up, had not tried to force their way in".

I know that there are people, perhaps even some on the Government Benches, who actually believe that drivel because they have been fed it for two decades. I simply ask people to read the Taylor report. Alcohol was absolutely rejected as the cause of the disaster. Once again, it was a convenient excuse—an expedient opportunity to smear the fans and abrogate responsibility. The Liverpool supporters were no better or worse than any other football fans of the day. The fans of other teams should be saying, "There but for the grace of God go we," because a similar tragedy could have befallen anyone at that time, particularly at that stadium, which did not even have a valid safety certificate. The Taylor report concluded that the great majority of fans "were not drunk or even the worse for drink".

However, Ingham's view obviously influenced the Sheffield coroner, who inexplicably took blood alcohol levels from every victim, including GRO-A was 10 years of age—just a child. Drink was not the cause, but it was used to accuse and condemn, to impugn and reproach. It was, quite frankly, a con.

The cause of the Hillsborough disaster is there for all to see in the Taylor report, which concluded that the police fundamentally lost control of the situation and did not demonstrate the leadership expected of senior officers; that the failure to cut off access to pens 3 and 4 was a blunder of the first order; that safety procedures were inadequate and the ground was badly maintained and dangerous; that the fans were routinely treated with contempt by football; and that Liverpool fans had been the victims rather than the guilty party.

 [Column 666](#)

Lord Taylor's reports, published in August 1989 and January 1990, dismissed the allegations against Liverpool supporters in relation to the disaster. Twenty-two years on, it is difficult to comprehend the enormity of the complete and utter breakdown of communication, or the inaction, by those charged with our safety. It is impossible to understand at a human level why those in authority simply stood idly by while ordinary football fans, without any emergency or medical training, organised themselves into stretcher-bearing squads to ferry stricken fans on advertising hoardings ripped from around the pitch and tried to give CPR to the stricken.

This was not a war zone. No battle had been fought, but we would not have guessed it from the scenes on the pitch. It was due to the Herculean efforts of ordinary fans—these same fans later besmirched by scandalous tabloid headlines—that the death toll was not even higher.

On the 20th anniversary of the disaster, I put on record my thanks to the ordinary people of Sheffield who opened their doors, in the days before mobile phones, to let fans call home to tell loved ones that they were safe. Tonight, both the leader and chief executive of Liverpool city council send messages of support from the people of Liverpool to those in Sheffield who helped on that dreadful day.

I am proud to be a Liverpudlian. In the 22 years for which the families have fought their dignified campaign, I and the rest of Britain have watched as my great city has come together on this issue. Out of the darkness of the Hillsborough tragedy, an eternal flame of unity has emerged and means that Liverpool is now synonymous with a unique kind of solidarity. Whether red or blue, we are Scousers all. To those who attempt to perpetrate the myth that it was the fault of the fans, I say that I will never tire of reminding them that the ordinary fans were the real heroes on the day, not the villains. They reacted while those in authority froze.


My granddad used to regale me with vivid accounts of the two world wars that he fought in, and while he never glorified in war itself he would explain to us children his sense of loss for fallen comrades, nearly half a century later. I did not really understand that when I was growing up,

but I do now. It does not matter how long it takes, we will never stop fighting for justice for the 96.

A botched inquest, a flawed inquiry, a farcical review of evidence and a system that worked against, instead of for, the families, have left a bitter taste. An unsympathetic Government, an unsatisfactory judicial process and an unforgiving press have led observers to believe that an organised conspiracy was acting against the best interests of natural justice. We need the Government to act, and we need this House to support the motion, to ensure that there is no further backsliding on this issue.

The Prime Minister quite rightly apologised for a previous Government's mishandling of events when he responded to the findings of the Saville report. Today, I call on the Prime Minister to make a statement in this House and apologise for the mistakes that were made and the mishandling of this whole tragedy on behalf of a previous Government. I also ask him to join me in pushing for the full disclosure of the senior police officer and the Conservative MP who allegedly leaked the story to the press, and in pressing for a front-page banner headline in *The Sun* newspaper admitting that it lied in April 1989, just as Kenny Dalglish demanded two decades ago.

We in Liverpool refer collectively to those lost at Hillsborough simply as “the 96”, but each of the 96 was an individual—a father, sister, brother, daughter, son; an irreplaceable person loved by others and with their own unique life story. “The 96” trips off the tongue far too easily. It is not until we read out each individual name on the Hillsborough memorial at Anfield that we realise just how long the list is. Parliament has never recorded their names in *Hansard* for posterity. Well, tonight, I can at least put one wrong right.

 [Column 667](#)

GRO-A


Rest in peace. Justice for the 96. *[Applause.]*

Several hon. Members

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rose —

Order. May we have brevity from those on the Front Benches? A lot of Back Benchers want to contribute. This is a very important debate and we have a lot of people in the Gallery who wish to hear it.

 [Column 668](#) 6.10pm**The Secretary of State for the Home Department >**

(Mrs Theresa May)

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May I first commend the hon. Member for Liverpool, Walton (Steve Rotheram), who movingly marked the memory of the 96 who lost their lives in the Hillsborough disaster? He has brought to this House not just the voice of the families of those who were lost on that fateful day, but his personal experience, which I am sure will have an impact on the whole House.

Going to watch a football match is something that brings great joy to hundreds of thousands of British people every weekend, but on that fateful April day in 1989, it brought not joy, but tragedy. Parents and children and brothers and sisters who left their homes that day to watch a football match were never to return.

I have met some of the families of the 96 and heard directly from them about the impact of that terrible day. They have shown nothing but dignity; they have asked for nothing but the truth.

I also want to pay tribute to the support that the whole of the Merseyside community has given in the campaign for the truth. No words from the Government can ever even begin to make up for the loss of 96 cherished lives, but I want to send my deepest condolences to all those affected by the national tragedy of Hillsborough.

Let me say here and now, in this House and on the record, that as Home Secretary, I will do everything in my power to ensure that the families and the public get the truth. As a Government, we fully support the Hillsborough independent panel and the process that the panel is leading to disclose the documents telling the whole story. No Government papers will be withheld from the panel. No attempts to suppress publication will be made. No stone will be left unturned.


The previous Government were right to establish a disclosure process overseen and driven not by the Government, but by an independent panel chaired by the Bishop of Liverpool. I pay tribute to the work of the right hon. Member for Leigh (Andy Burnham) and the hon. Member for Liverpool, Walton for the work they did to secure the establishment of that panel.

Following my appointment as Home Secretary, I announced the coalition Government's full support for the process. I met the Bishop of Liverpool soon after coming to office so that he could give me an update on progress and so that I could give him my assurance of our support. I have also met the bishop subsequently so that he could keep me informed about the panel's work.

The Hillsborough independent panel has three principal tasks: to oversee the disclosure of the documents to the maximum possible degree, which will initially be to the families; to report on its work, outlining the ways in which the information disclosed adds to the public understanding of the tragedy; and to make recommendations as to a permanent Hillsborough archive.

The principle underlying the process is that of maximum possible disclosure, and of disclosure to the families first and then to the wider public. This is difficult, sensitive and lengthy work, and it cannot be rushed. However, the aims of the process are, I believe, aims we can all agree on, and we should continue to uphold them.

As the Bishop of Liverpool has said, the dignity of the families should be matched by the dignity of this process. The families deserve to be treated with dignity and respect in the way they receive the information, which brings me on to the reason for this debate.

 [Column 669](#)

The reason for this debate and for the motion behind it concerns the Cabinet Office's decision not to disclose papers relating to the disaster in response to a freedom of information request from a BBC reporter. I want to state very clearly that the Government's position has absolutely nothing to do with attempting to suppress the release of those papers or somehow to hide the truth. I am sorry that the way the Government responded to the FOI request caused anxiety among the families and concern on Merseyside and beyond.

The Government firmly believe that the right way to release the papers is through the Hillsborough independent panel—to the families first and then to the public. The families should have the papers, and they should not have them filtered through politicians or the media. We therefore support the Hillsborough independent panel and today's motion. We want full disclosure to the panel of all documents relating to Hillsborough, including Cabinet minutes. Those documents should be uncensored and unredacted. Indeed, the full unredacted Cabinet Office papers on Hillsborough have already been made available to the panel. That includes minutes of the meetings of the Cabinet immediately following the disaster.

As the Prime Minister said in the letter that he sent to the right hon. Member for Leigh:

"Please let me reassure you that the Government is wholly committed to full disclosure of the Hillsborough information that it holds...As you will be aware, Cabinet papers, along with other relevant government papers, have been released to the Hillsborough independent panel. I am keen to ensure that the panel and indeed the families were treated with the utmost respect in this process. We have therefore proposed that the panel will ensure that disclosure takes place initially to the Hillsborough families, prior to wider publication."

The Government are not seeking to avoid the publication of Cabinet minutes or any other Hillsborough papers. The Cabinet papers on Hillsborough can be published, and the Government will do nothing to prevent the panel from publishing them or indeed whatever it so decides. The panel will release the full picture of what happened at Hillsborough, but in a way that is respectful of the families.

The panel's terms of reference envisage minimal redaction to avoid junior officials' names and addresses being published; to avoid signatures being available for copying; and to ensure that the Data Protection Act is not breached. It might also be necessary to redact sensitive private and personal information specific to the victims. However, it will be the role of the panel to ensure that any redactions are kept to a minimum.

The principle is clear: full publication and minimal redaction, and the panel seeing all of the papers, uncensored and unredacted—as the families have rightly demanded: the whole loaf, not snippets. I stand ready to do anything I can to aid the independent panel in completing its task.

Hillsborough was a terrible tragedy—a tragedy that must never be repeated. As the Bishop of Liverpool has said, the disaster and its aftermath inflicted a deep wound in the body of the Merseyside community which remains to this day. The families of the 96 deserve the truth. That is why we fully support the Hillsborough independent panel; why all Government papers, including Cabinet minutes, have been made available to the panel with no restrictions on access; and why the Government support this motion.

 [Column 670](#)

 6.18pm

Andy Burnham >
(Leigh) (Lab)

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We are here tonight because 139,815 people have asked this House to revisit events 22 years old. They are right, because those events concern one of the biggest injustices of the 20th century. For 22 years, the Hillsborough families faced insults and had obstacles placed in their way at every step as they pursued their dignified campaign for truth and justice.

Recognising that, a call for full disclosure was made on the 20th anniversary. That has gathered momentum ever since, and this summer it was supported by people from all over the country and supporters of all football clubs. That was an incredible statement of solidarity with those families, who have faced a hard and, at times, lonely struggle. However, it did something else: it sent the clearest of messages to everyone in a position of authority that the families have suffered far too much, and that the whole truth about Hillsborough must finally be told.

Tonight, the Home Secretary has made an unequivocal commitment to full disclosure, echoing the words of the Prime Minister in his letter to me. We thank her for that. The fact that there is now agreement between all parties across the House shows the watching world that this is not about party politics but about the fundamental rights of victims and their families. I should also like to thank the Home Secretary for leading the Government's response to the debate tonight. That sends an important signal to the families who have travelled to be here, and to the thousands of others watching closely at home who have been deeply affected by the tragedy. The right hon. Lady might have expected to see my right hon. Friend the Member for Normanton, Pontefract and Castleford (Yvette Cooper) opposite her tonight, but my right hon. Friend has graciously allowed me to respond for the Opposition, given my personal involvement in these matters. I thank her for that.

I want to begin by addressing this simple question: why are almost 140,000 people asking us to do more? There have certainly been other disasters in which concerns have remained long after the event. As with other disasters, there are things about Hillsborough that people will find shocking, such as the fact that the ground did not have a valid safety certificate, as my hon. Friend the Member for Liverpool, Walton (Steve Rotheram) mentioned. But something else makes Hillsborough stand apart. Has there ever been, and will there ever be, another tragedy at which, within minutes, an orchestrated campaign began to blame the victims, their families, friends and fellow supporters? That is precisely what happened there. It is unprecedented in the recent history of our country, and an unbelievable act of brutality against 96 families already suffering unbearable grief. As one bereaved mother said:

"We soon realised that we weren't only in a fight for justice for those who died but also to clear their names and the names of the fans who lived".

Those are words that no mother in her position should ever have had to say.

 [Column 671](#)

The first damaging lie about Hillsborough came even as people lay dying, not long after 3.15, from a senior public servant, the officer in charge on that day. Chief Superintendent Duckenfield told the then chief executive of the Football Association that Liverpool fans had forced gate C, as my hon. Friend said. That was not true; he had given permission for the gate to be opened. Professor Phil Scruton wrote in his brilliant book, "Hillsborough—the Truth":

"Graham Kelly unwittingly...repeated Duckenfield's lie to the waiting media. Within minutes, it was broadcast to the world: an appalling disaster was happening, and Liverpool fans were to blame."

Sadly for the families, that set the level for what was to follow. Blood alcohol levels were taken from the victims, including children, as they lay dead in the gymnasium at Hillsborough. By today's standards, that is an unthinkable intrusion into the private grief of the families. As the families arrived at Hillsborough later that day to identify loved ones, they were subjected to police questioning as though they, and the deceased, were suspects. In the '80s, the authorities could get away with that type of behaviour—people just had to put up with it—but by today's standards, it is truly shocking.

There was much worse to come, however. Days later, the most sickening lies imaginable were briefed by public servants to newspapers throughout the land. It was a brutal campaign to set public opinion against the supporters and to pre-empt the public inquiry that was to be carried out by Lord Justice Taylor. Let me remind the House that Taylor found that hooliganism played no part in the Hillsborough disaster, and that the main reason for it was the “failure of police control”. Yet even today, people talk about Hillsborough in the context of hooliganism. Casual allegations are still made about drunkenness and disorder. The fact that this still happens, 22 years on, is testimony to the power of the poison in those police briefings to the media. It is also clear that efforts were made not only to shape public opinion but to shape the way in which evidence was presented to the inquiries that would follow.

We hope that the House will tonight give the Hillsborough independent panel the full power and authority to tell the whole truth about Hillsborough, but there are already documents in the public domain that provide clear evidence of the efforts that went on to present events in a certain way. I want to share some of them with the House tonight, as they will help to explain to people who perhaps have not followed every detail down the years why so many people still feel so strongly about this, as we do.

In the House of Lords, there are files containing the original personal statements of police officers who witnessed these terrible events at first hand. They are hard to read, so distressing are the scenes they describe. One in particular stands out, and I have it with me this evening. It is the handwritten statement of police constable No. 227 from Woodseats police station. These are his recollections of the crucial moments just after 3 pm on 15 April 1989:

“I realised at that time that a great tragedy had occurred. I began to feel myself being overcome with emotion, but soon realised that I would be of no use to anyone if I felt sorry for myself. I was assisted out of the terracing and onto the pitch. I saw several officers wandering about in a dazed and confused state. Some were crying and some simply sat on the grass. Members of the public were running about with boarding ferrying people from the pitch to the far end of the ground.”

 Column 672

PC 227's words evoke the haunting TV images that people were later to see replayed time and again. There can be little doubt of their sincerity, but they are not the only words on the page. Attached to the top right corner of the statement is a note from a senior officer. It reads:

“Last 2 pages require amending. These are his own feelings. He also states that PCs were sat down crying when the fans were carrying the dead and injured. This shows they were organised and we were not. Have the PC re-write the last 2 pages excluding the points mentioned.”

In the cold light of 2011, those are truly shocking words. They go to the heart of the untold story of Hillsborough. The unforgettable words

“they were organised and we were not”

transport us straight back to a very different time: an era of “them and us”, when football supporters were considered to be the “enemy within”. It is as though the officer was describing a battle for supremacy between two sides rather than the immediate aftermath of a terrible tragedy.

I do not think that it is widely understood that the personal statements of police officers were collected and amended in that way, outside the normal procedures. That is why the panel's work and its report are so important. They will mean that the rest of the country will finally see what the Hillsborough families were up against, and what they have known for years. PC 227's statement was not the only one that was amended. Many more were, in order to portray events in a certain way, removing references to police failure on the day such as the lack of proper radio communications.

Hillsborough belonged to an entirely different era, predating the Freedom of Information Act, when public bodies held all the power. As a result, it is still not known who was responsible for the efforts to amend statements, the level at which that was endorsed in the South Yorkshire police, and the extent to which the then Government supported the police strategy of blaming the supporters. I say this not to make a political point. This is crucial to understanding how and why the police case against the supporters came to gather such potency, pre-empting the public inquiry.

Another area that I hope will be illuminated by the disclosure process is the 3.15 cut-off imposed by the coroner, and the way in which the inquests were subsequently organised. It is impossible to overstate the significance of this to the families, as the effect of it was to compound earlier injustices that they had faced. It means that they have never had the opportunity properly to test all the evidence and information about their loved ones, or to find out if any more could have been done for them. One of the individuals admitted to hospital recovered, challenging the theory that irreparable damage was done in all cases by 3.15. Indeed, there is medical evidence from one of the doctors who treated victims on that day which was never properly heard. The 3.15 cut-off was cruel. It was also crucial, because it denied the families the right properly to challenge the inaccurate claims that had been put around about their loved ones.

I am setting out these issues this evening because many of them will not be widely known around the country. They explain why the sense of injustice about Hillsborough and its aftermath on Merseyside has never diminished. They were the reason that, together with my hon. Friend the Member for Garston and Halewood (Maria Eagle) I made the first call for full public disclosure in April 2009, days before the memorial service on the 20th anniversary.

Column 673

As the Home Secretary said, this led to the establishment of the Hillsborough independent panel, and I appreciate the continued support that she and her Government have provided to that panel's work. At the time it was established there was an unresolved debate within government about whether or not Cabinet minutes and other documents should be published. I have always been of the firm opinion that they should, but because there was no agreement, the terms of reference allow the panel only to view rather than publish the material.

I knew we would have to come back to this issue; that duly happened in the summer when the Information Commissioner ruled on the BBC's freedom of information request. I said then that I believed the commissioner's ruling should have been immediately accepted by the Government and proposals developed to fulfil it, working through the panel with disclosure to families first. I have no doubt that the Government were acting to protect the integrity of the panel and the interests of the families and not—the Home Secretary made this point—to prevent disclosure. As I said in my letter to the Prime Minister, however, the Government's handling of their response to the commissioner risked undermining public trust in the panel and the disclosure process.

The Home Secretary has this evening removed any lingering doubt and put the Government's commitment to full disclosure firmly on the record. We thank her for the clarity of her words, but for the avoidance of doubt, does she agree that there might be a case for issuing the Hillsborough independent panel with updated terms of reference, reflecting the clear will of this House tonight? That might also present an opportunity to set out the Government's position on any redactions to disclosed material. I believe that there should be a clear presumption of no redactions to any material. I am told, and the Home Secretary repeated it, that there might be highly personal medical information that it would be illegal to put in the public domain under the Data Protection Act. If that is the case, may I ask her to ensure that any redactions have the full support of the panel and may I suggest that they be made to any documents only with the agreement and support of the Hillsborough families?

I would like to assure the Home Secretary that the Opposition fully support the Government's policy of handling all disclosures through the panel and making them available to the families first. The Opposition urge both the Information Commissioner and the BBC to accept that as fulfilment of the ruling. Disclosure is important, but it is only part of the panel's crucial work. It has also been asked to make sense of it all, producing a report on how what is disclosed adds to

public understanding of the tragedy and its aftermath. That is hugely important. It means that the whole story and its full impact will finally be told. That is why I support the Government's position to release documents not now in a haphazard and unco-ordinated way, but when the whole picture is put together and all the pieces are in place.

I wish to deal now with material held by private bodies and its potential disclosure. It is possible that there are documents and material held by private organisations that will be highly relevant to the work of the Hillsborough independent panel. I understand that Sheffield Wednesday football club and the Football Association have both co-operated with the panel, and I thank them for that.

Clearly, however, there are other private organisations that will have material that might help the panel's work. The first is Hammond Suddards, the solicitors for the South Yorkshire police. It was involved in the preparation of police officers' statements, and, indeed, the amendment of them, and the handling of the inquest. The second is News International. In *The Guardian* today, Margaret Aspinall, chair of the Hillsborough family support group, has called on the company to reveal the sources of the deeply hurtful front page of Wednesday 19 April. It was claimed that Liverpool supporters—my hon. Friend the Member for Liverpool, Walton mentioned this—pick-pocketed victims, urinated on police officers and attacked an officer giving the kiss of life.

It is important to say that *The Sun* was not the only newspaper to carry inaccurate and deeply hurtful lies. Allegations on the same theme were reported by the *Daily Star*, *Daily Express*, *Daily Mail* and *Yorkshire Post*, all using unattributed quotes from police and Police Federation sources. Lord Justice Taylor commented in his report on how they were not substantiated by a single witness. For people in public positions to disseminate such offensive untruths certainly breaks professional ethics and is possibly a criminal act. It might have happened 22 years ago, but the pain caused by those lies is still felt today.

Does the Home Secretary share my view that Margaret Aspinall is right to assert the families' right to know who gave those briefings and with what authorisation? I hope she will agree with me that media organisations, and particularly News International, should be approached by the panel and encouraged to hand over any material that might reveal who made these claims. It is my belief that the British public, following the revelations about phone hacking, will see Hillsborough in a new light. That, too, is a story of unacceptable collusion between police and the press, working against the wider public interest, and it, too, must be fully exposed, with those responsible held to account.

In conclusion, 140,000 voices have swept Hillsborough back to the Floor of this House tonight, but we would not be here if it were not for the courage and determination of the families. Soon, they will be able to rest, knowing that they could not possibly have done more for their loved ones. I pay tribute to the Hillsborough family support group—to Trevor Hicks, Phil Hammond and Margaret Aspinall; to Hope for Hillsborough, and to the Hillsborough justice campaign for keeping the flame alive for the 96.

I have not seen the files. I do not know what they will reveal, but I am already clear about one thing—that, after a tragedy on this scale, the denial of families' rights and the denigration of their friends and fellow supporters is a national scandal. When the panel reports, it will require an appropriate national response.

I can remember 15 April 1989 as if it were yesterday. I was at Villa Park for the other FA cup semi-final. Many of my friends were at Hillsborough. Twenty years later, I agonised about whether to attend the memorial service as a Government representative. No issue matters more to me, and I was worried that I would not be able to keep my composure before the Kop, but I also had my own private disappointments that my own Government had not done enough to help those families. I look back on my decision to go as the best decision I have made in my life because the reaction of people on the Kop that day told the rest of the country that there was a deep and unresolved injustice.

Column 674

Column 675

That night, I met the families at Liverpool town hall. I promised them full disclosure, that the whole truth would be told. Tonight, to have the entire House united behind them in that call and behind those families is a huge moment. Part of the painful truth of Hillsborough is that none of us, no political party, did enough to help. This time, we must not let them down.

Several hon. Members

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rose—

Mr Deputy Speaker >

(Mr Lindsay Hoyle)

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Order. I remind the House that we have an eight-minute limit on Back-Bench speeches. I want to ensure that everyone who wants to participate gets in, so any additional brevity during speeches will be welcome.

 6.37pm

Esther McVey >

(Wirral West) (Con)

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This debate has been a long time coming. The journey to get here has been a long, painful fight led by the families of the 96 victims, the people of Liverpool, the local papers—the *Liverpool Daily Post* and the *Liverpool Echo*—and football supporters. The support and the quest for answers have not diminished. Instead, they have gathered momentum over time. The family voices have stayed firm; the commitment to loved ones has been unshakeable. Finally, the families are here today to see this debate, so let us make sure that every politician of every party does right by them, allowing them complete access to all material—unedited and unredacted—so that they can understand what happened, and have answers and closure, perhaps a little peace, but most of all so that they can have some truth about what happened on 15 April 1989.

People say Liverpool is a close-knit community, but it is so much more than that. It is an extended family, and it is the compassion and the passion of the people of Liverpool that have supported the families in striving for the truth. When people talk of Hillsborough, they speak as though everyone from the city knew somebody there that day, and in a way they did. My cousins were there—safe, yes, but when a call came to the crowd, asking whether any police, medical staff or officers could come and help, my cousin stepped forward. He was one of those people, one of the fans asked to help the injured and to identify people. It was that help that was so cruelly and inaccurately misrepresented in the tabloids.

The Prime Minister accepted that the Hillsborough tragedy and its aftermath has left a deep wound on Merseyside. He has given an unqualified commitment to full disclosure of files relating to what happened. He agreed to this before today's debate, but I still believe it is important that we are all here today, that this tragedy is given the importance it deserves and that voice is given to the 145,000 e-petitioners who voted in favour of today's debate in the House. They want full disclosure, and they want all the families to have the final, ultimate say in what happens to the information.

 [Column 676](#)

An independent panel of experts, academics and archivists, headed by the Right Rev. James Jones, Bishop of Liverpool, has been appointed to oversee and make sense of the volume of documents. The families—those who have suffered most—must now be supported by the panel and by Government.

The political journey has come full circle. In too many instances, questions have been ducked. It has taken 22 years, and I want to be part of a Parliament and a Government who do right by the families who have carried so much pain for so long.

Let me close my speech by saying that it is time for words to come to an end. It is time for action. It is time to release all those documents in their entirety.

🕒 6.40pm

Derek Twigg >

(Halton) (Lab)

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Let me first say a big thank you to my right hon. Friend the Member for Leigh (Andy Burnham). I was at the 20th anniversary commemoration service at Anfield, and I know that that was a very emotional occasion for my right hon. Friend. I think that he felt the rawness tenfold—knowing how the families, Liverpool fans and others felt about an injustice that has continued for over 22 years—and I think that he did well to get through his speech and deliver his message on that day. I want to record my thanks for what he did, along with my hon. Friend the Member for Garston and Halewood (Maria Eagle). As I have said, it was an emotional occasion. There were 30,000 people in the stadium that day. I have been going to such commemoration services for many years, but that occasion demonstrated the depth of support for the families, and for the securing of the truth and justice that we all seek.

I was present at the Hillsborough disaster. I drove to the ground that day with three friends. As was recalled by my hon. Friend the Member for Liverpool, Walton (Steve Rotherham), it was a beautiful sunny day, and we were looking forward to a good match—one of many good matches that we had seen as Liverpool supporters. One could never have imagined how the event would end. As we approached the stadium we sensed that something was wrong, and indeed the chaos had already started outside the Leppings Lane end. We witnessed mounting chaos around the turnstiles. When we eventually managed to pass through them, our tickets were not checked. There was no organisation and no policing. As I have said, it was complete chaos.

I watched the disaster. I was in the north stand, and my three friends were at the Leppings Lane end. I felt somewhat let down because I did not have a ticket for Leppings Lane. I would normally stand up in the Liverpool Kop, but for some reason I had ended up with a stand ticket, which meant sitting down, and I felt that I had lost out. Of course I did not know what was about to happen, and I did not know what had happened to my three friends in Leppings Lane until some time later.

As I have said, I watched the whole horror of the disaster unfold in front of me. It was obvious well before 3 pm that pens 3 and 4, the middle pens, were full, but on either side of them the stand was empty. I will not go into the details, because we have been through them back in 1998 and since, but it beggars belief that the police and those responsible could not see what was happening. It had to be seen to be believed. Then, of course, we saw the disaster unfold.

 [Column 677](#)

The horror of that day will always live with me, but I did not lose my life, and nor did anyone personally known to me. The families, however, are in a completely different position. I recognise the dignified and determined way in which they have pursued their fight for justice, in spite of the terrible slur perpetrated by the police, with the help of certain sections of the press, in blaming Liverpool supporters for the disaster. Those families have my deepest respect. It is their love for their loved ones, and their burning desire to put a wrong right, that have kept them going for 22 years. Imagine 22 years of fighting this! It is quite unbelievable—but they still have the energy and drive to see this through. One person could not be here tonight. He said that he was tired and would not be here: he wanted to save his energy, so that he could see the conclusion of the campaign and see that justice was done.

Imagine finding out that your loved one had died in that terrible disaster, or been badly injured, and reading or hearing shortly afterwards that that person and his fellow supporters were being blamed for it. It is almost unimaginable that, notwithstanding the grief and trauma that those families were going through, those reports should unfold in the next few days. As has been said, several newspapers were involved, but I think that a headline in *The Sun* caused the most

distress and upset. It is difficult for those who were not personally affected to appreciate the impact of that headline. The fact that police officers were involved as well was disgraceful. The distress caused by all that cannot be overstated.

As my right hon. Friend the Member for Leigh said, the 3.15 pm cut-off point is crucial, because nothing that happened after that time was taken into consideration. We know that people were alive then, and, as my right hon. Friend made clear, that is an issue for some of the families. It was an unbelievable decision. Dozens of ambulances were not allowed into the stadium, and it was also unbelievable that that was allowed to happen. As my hon. Friend the Member for Liverpool, Walton pointed out, it was Liverpool supporters who led the rescue mission, if I can call it that, carrying bodies and injured people away from Leppings Lane outside the ground.

I welcomed the Home Secretary's statement about the independent panel. There was some discussion about the establishment of the panel, and there was a good deal of mistrust among the families because of all that had happened previously, but they went along with the process and became involved in detailed negotiations with the Government. I was asked by Liverpool and Merseyside Members of Parliament to represent them in those negotiations, which required considerable hard work. The panel's primary aim is to ensure the recording and orderly release of the documents, which—this is crucial—must be shown to the families first. However, as my right hon. Friend the Member for Leigh knows, we managed to ensure that the production of a report was included in the agreement. That report will be crucial to the process of putting the truth in the public domain, and enhancing our understanding of the events and information relating to the disaster.

I welcome the Prime Minister's unequivocal commitment to full disclosure, but will the Minister confirm that it will include the advice on which the Director of Public Prosecutions based his decision not to prosecute any senior police officers? Will it also include the reasons for moving an experienced match commander, Chief Superintendent Mole, a few weeks before the semi-final and replacing him with Chief Superintendent David Duckenfield, who was relatively inexperienced in the policing of football matches?

I think it important for Ministers, and the Government generally, to tread carefully, because there have been some problems. I know that what the Secretary of State for Culture, Olympics, Media and Sport said about hooliganism was taken out of context, but the fact remains that it caused a great deal of distress to the families. Moreover, last week's debacle involving the hon. Member for Christchurch (Mr Chope) almost scuppered tonight's debate. We need careful planning and thinking about how this matter should be dealt with from now on.

The Secretary of State for Culture, Olympics, Media and Sport >

(Mr Jeremy Hunt)

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As the hon. Gentleman has referred to comments that I made, may I take this opportunity to apologise to the House—as I have to the families—for those comments? What I said was sloppily worded, it caused great offence, and I hugely regret it. The families were incredibly generous in accepting the apology that I made to them.

Derek Twigg >

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I know that the Secretary of State did not mean his remarks in the sense in which they were portrayed. I gave that example, along with last week's, to emphasise that all this must be dealt with sensitively. The families have been through so much, and sometimes things have been wrongly said, have not been done or have been glibly avoided.

I want to put on record my thanks to the people of Sheffield. What lives with me is the memory of queues of supporters outside residents' houses—and I mean queues: not two or three people, but 10, 20 or 30—who were allowed to use those residents' telephones to let their families know that they were OK, and were given cups of tea. That was tremendous. The contribution and support of the people of Sheffield should be on record, and is one of the images that live with me

 [Column 678](#)

to this day as I recall walking back from the ground. We want justice for the 96, and we want to make sure that all this information is released and that the families can see it first; that is crucial. We also want the Government to consider very carefully the report that will be produced, and to respond in a positive way that ensures that the families know both that everything possible has been done to get the information out and that their fight has not been in vain.

🕒 6.50pm

John Pugh >

(Southport) (LD)

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I begin by congratulating, on behalf of, I think, all of us here today, the hon. Member for Liverpool, Walton (Steve Rotheram). None of us can hope to match his eloquence, passion, persistence and, frankly, the raw emotion he has displayed today. I first knew him as a very effective mayor of Liverpool city council, and he has today proved to be a very effective champion of his area and of Merseyside as a whole. I want to thank him for associating me with his efforts in making the all-party applications; this has been an all-party endeavour. I also want to mention the hon. Gentleman's predecessor, Peter Kilfoyle. Even though he was a lifelong Evertonian, he did a lot of work for this cause in the House.

 [Column 679](#)

I should declare an interest. I am a Liverpool FC supporter. My entire family came from Liverpool, and I grew up there, although I had the misfortune originally, as a child in a city that was oozing football success, to be taken every Saturday to Knotty Ash to watch our one and only rugby league team get beaten repeatedly week after week—thereby amply preparing me for life as a Liberal.

I think I understand the Liverpool character as well as most. A history that has often been quite brutal has endowed that character with two marked traits. The first is a profound emphasis on social solidarity. People have learned to depend on each other—on family and neighbourhood. That was beautifully summed up by Bill Shankly in the following quote, of which I have a copy in my office:

“the only way to live and to be truly successful is by collective effort, with everyone working for each other, everyone helping each other, and everyone having a share of the rewards at the end of the day.”

The second major trait has also been forged by a hard history. It is a lack of reverence—a suspicion and questioning of authority and all the pomposity and cant that often underpins it. That is the reason why Liverpool produces so many comedians. It is a feeling that the world is not necessarily on our side—and, indeed, often it is not, especially for those who spend their time questioning authority, and the pomposity and the cant underpinning it.

Hillsborough was a terrible tragedy for Liverpool. At the time I was a councillor in Sefton, and we outside the immediate Liverpool area lost many people. Afterwards, there was an opportunity to show that things could be different, but what happened? As expected, there was a massive, deeply impressive show of solidarity, and it continues, confirming that this is the city where the way forward is not “walking alone” and where social solidarity is important. The people were, however, let down by the powers that be: the national media, including *The Sun*, about which much has been said today; those in the legal system, about which we have not said as much as we ought to have done; and the police—we have mentioned Duggan—who tried to shift blame. Some—but not all—of them perpetuated, relied on or were diverted by prejudices, not just about football supporters but specifically about Liverpool football supporters. That was the case both knowingly and, sometimes, unknowingly, and explicitly and implicitly. Unsurprisingly therefore, there has been no closure. Not only the narrative of what happened but of how different people told—or tried to tell in order to fix—that narrative has never been fully before us.


I genuinely believe that we get better inquiries and inquests if the people running them are prepared to look at their limitations and flaws. We get better reporting if the media at least acknowledge their failings. We also get better policing if the police openly account for their wrongdoing and the error in their own ranks. Truthfulness at all levels is the path to improvement.

Mr Dave Watts >

(St Helens North) (Lab)

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The hon. Gentleman may be aware that I lost a close friend, **GRO-A** in the Hillsborough tragedy. I have something to say about the fact that someone in the media, Kelvin MacKenzie, said what he said and then repeated it. The general public have severe doubts about whether the press should allow such people to continue to follow their profession. Does the hon. Gentleman feel that special attention should be given to dealing with journalists who do these sorts of things?

 [Column 680](#)

John Pugh >

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I am aware from books written on this topic that certain people in the offices of *The Sun* questioned Kelvin MacKenzie about his decision on that day.

Liverpool people are not stupid; they know there are good and, sometimes, not so good men in all uniforms. They know that judges are likely to spend more time at Twickenham than on the football terraces so do not necessarily have adequate knowledge of the latter. They know that lawyers can be, and have been, both cynical and noble in addressing this issue. They know that football supporters also come in all shapes and sizes, and that everyone has their prejudices. The antidote to all that, however, is not reports and procedures; rather, it is a single-minded pursuit of the truth. The antidote is not a narrative that suits one or another group or institution, or even one that allows all interests to make peace.

Liverpudlian John Lennon's song "Gimme some Truth" puts this point most simply. One verse—I am unsure whether it applies to any Member who is present—states:

"I'm sick and tired of hearing things

From uptight, short-sighted, narrow-minded hypocrites

All I want is the truth

Just gimme some truth".

The full truth will not necessarily make everything right again. The horror that was Hillsborough will recede in time, even though for some it is, of course, relived every day. However, we owe it to them and the victims to ensure that what passes into history is not a myth or a convenient narrative, but is, so far as is humanly possible, the true and full account of the events.

 6.56pm

Mrs Louise Ellman >

(Liverpool, Riverside) (Lab/Co-op)

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I congratulate my hon. Friend the Member for Liverpool, Walton (Steve Rotheram) on securing, along with others, this debate and on the manner in which he opened it. It is an important part of the long and determined campaign to secure truth and justice for the 96, and it is a crucial step in the effort to secure the release of further important information. From the beginning, when this horrendous tragedy occurred, truth has been withheld. Tonight, we have heard that

there was a police briefing to mislead the public by deliberately distorting the facts, and to do so by promulgating the grotesque untruth that Liverpool fans were responsible for the tragedy on that dreadful day.

Lord Taylor's report was a full judicial inquiry into what happened and it made it clear that the major cause was police failure on the day and that that should be considered against the backdrop of the failure to deal with public safety—there was the astonishing discovery that no safety certificate had been issued at Hillsborough—and the failure to have and implement an emergency plan to deal with any public disaster. As we have heard from my right hon. Friend the Member for Leigh (Andy Burnham), evidence has also come to light—from documents revealed as a consequence of the scrutiny undertaken by Lord Justice Stuart-Smith—that the original police eyewitness statements describing what they saw at the time were later changed by their seniors.

Column 681

There have been further disclosures showing further withholding of essential information. The coroner's decision to have a 3.15 pm cut-off on the assumption that all deaths would have occurred by then resulted in vital information being withheld, and major concerns were raised about the conduct of the inquest and mini-inquests.

When discussing this issue, it should always be remembered that nobody has been brought to account. The Director of Public Prosecutions in 1990 decided that the tragedies arose from "accidental" deaths and he stated that there was no evidence to prosecute any corporate body and insufficient evidence to prosecute individuals. Two police officers were named as culpable, but they both retired before any disciplinary action could be taken.

Recognition of the need for urgent disclosure lay behind the important decision of December 2009 to set up the independent panel chaired by the highly respected and trusted Bishop of Liverpool, the Right Rev. James Jones. The fundamental principle of that panel was the

"full disclosure of documentation and no redaction of content, except in the limited legal and other circumstances outlined in"

a full terms of reference and

"disclosure protocol."

Today's debate goes a little further than that. It seeks full disclosure, including of what specific briefing might have been given to the then Prime Minister, Margaret Thatcher, when she visited Hillsborough the day after the disaster. The motion also calls for the release of Cabinet papers that discussed the tragedy. I fully support the primacy of the panel and the families, which has been mentioned by the Home Secretary tonight. However, I would like to know how she views the importance of that primacy in relation to the terms of reference already stated and to her commitment that there would be full disclosure and that the Government would not attempt to prevent the publication of anything that the panel and the families wanted to be disclosed.

The Hillsborough tragedy killed 96 people and has had a profound effect on families and on the community. Lost lives cannot be regained, but the bereaved families have waited too long for the full truth. They deserve no less than the truth, and the correct decision today, together with the Home Secretary's statement, can take us all a lot nearer to achieving that.

🕒 7.01pm

Stephen Mosley >

(City of Chester) (Con)

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For the families of all those who tragically lost their lives on 15 April 1989 and all those still traumatised by the events that unfolded before them that day, today is another milestone in their arduous pursuit of justice. I commend the solidarity shown by all who have enabled this debate to take place. Their quest for truth must not be hindered any longer.

As the Member of Parliament for the City of Chester, a city with close ties to our neighbours on Merseyside, I am grateful to have the opportunity to speak on behalf of the residents of my constituency whose lives were irreversibly changed by the tragic events in Sheffield 22 years ago. Many people from Chester were at Hillsborough that day and there are many heartbreaking stories and memories. One of the stories is that of the GRO-A family. Seventeen-year-old GRO-A and his 19-year-old brother GRO-A were both at Hillsborough. GRO-A died in the disaster and GRO-A who survived the crush, died just six months later after falling into a hyperglycaemic coma as a result of diabetes. Their parents, GRO-A whom I have known for about 10 years due to their tireless involvement in the local community in Chester, recall how GRO-A was unable to talk about what happened in the months following his brother's death. Although it was diabetes that took their eldest son from them, GRO-A maintain that GRO-A died of a broken heart. For the GRO-A family, who are members of the Hillsborough family support group, and the hundreds more affected by Hillsborough, questions surrounding the deaths of their loved ones have remained unanswered for 22 years.

Column 682

A second constituent, Mrs GRO-A who is watching this debate from the Gallery, lost her 15-year-old son, GRO-A. Mrs GRO-A has campaigned tirelessly to discover the truth surrounding her son's death and is patron of the Hope For Hillsborough charity and campaign group. Like those of many others, Mrs Williams' campaigns have centred on the decision taken by the coroner, Dr Stefan Popper, to pronounce that all the victims of the disaster had died by 3.15 pm from compressive asphyxia. However, witness statements at the time highlighted the fact that Kevin was still showing signs of life at 3.55 pm, calling out for his mother. Many families of the victims are still angry at the 3.15 pm cut-off point, which meant that the inquest was unable to consider the response of the police and the other emergency services after that time. Having had three requests to the Attorney-General for a new inquest into Kevin's death refused, Mrs Williams submitted her case to the European Court of Human Rights, but in 2009 that attempt was scuppered by the Court, which declared that her application should have been lodged within six months of Lord Justice Stuart-Smith's scrutiny in 1997. Like so many others, Mrs GRO-A hopes that the release of the papers will cast new light on the events that truly occurred before, during, and after Kevin's death.

This is not the first time GRO-A has been mentioned in the House; an Adjournment debate entitled simply GRO-A was held on 26 October 1994, in which the former Member for Crosby, Sir Malcolm Thornton, said:

"It was inevitable that judgments would be made on the spot which perhaps, with the benefit of hindsight and of considering the matter after some years had passed, should not and certainly would not have been made. But what is there to hide?"—[Official Report, 26 October 1994; Vol. 248, c. 978.]

Seventeen years after Sir Malcolm asked that question, and 22 years after GRO-A's death, we still do not know the answer. What is there to hide? It is now time for that question to be answered.

We are united in this House in recognising that all the papers must be released, but the manner in which they are released is of equal importance. A drip-drip release of information is dreaded by many of the victims' families, who fear that snippets of selected information will hit the headlines, creating a feeding frenzy in the press and potentially distorting the overall picture that the release of papers is intended to piece together. The Hillsborough independent panel, chaired by the Bishop of Liverpool, James Jones, is the only legitimate vehicle through which this information should be initially released. A large quantity of the information will be extremely sensitive, as it details the deaths of many families' loved ones, so the families must be allowed to make sense of the information before it is released to the general public. Furthermore, a conscious effort must be made by the independent panel to include all the families in the process. With a number of different groups supporting the families of those affected, including the Hillsborough family support group, the Hillsborough justice campaign, and Hope for Hillsborough, I would like to stress the importance of ensuring that all the families are kept

Column 683

informed of the progress of the independent panel and of the disclosure of the panel's findings. We must not allow the families to experience any more unnecessary anguish, and we must grant them the dignity that they so rightly deserve.

To that end, I support the Government's position on the BBC's freedom of information request, which could lead to the Cabinet papers bypassing the independent panel and being released immediately. The BBC submitted the FOI request with the best of intentions, but now that the Cabinet Office has recognised the overriding public interest in releasing all the papers to the panel, the BBC should recognise that its FOI request has achieved its objective and that the documents should be released only through the independent panel.

As I have said, the events of that fateful day in the spring of 1989 have lived long in the memories of those who so sadly lost their loved ones—they will never be forgotten. Although the release of the information contained among the mountain of unpublished papers is undoubtedly in the public interest, the interests of the families and survivors of Hillsborough are now the most pressing concern. For their sake alone, clarity is of the utmost importance. I believe that that can be achieved only by allowing the Hillsborough independent panel to conduct its investigation. Once the families have been given the opportunity to digest the panel's final report, and only then, the documents must be widely and publicly disclosed.

 7.08pm

Maria Eagle >

(Garston and Halewood) (Lab)

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I begin by congratulating my hon. Friend the Member for Liverpool, Walton (Steve Rotheram) on his superb effort in securing this debate and on his incredibly powerful opening speech. I also wish to thank the 140,000 people who signed the e-petition, which so strengthened my hon. Friend's hand when he attended the Backbench Business Committee to argue for time to have this debate on the Floor of the House.

This subject is of massive importance to my constituents, to Liverpool football fans, to football fans generally, to the city of Liverpool and to Merseyside as a whole, as shown by the fact that all the Merseyside MPs supported my hon. Friend's proposal that time be found, on a votable motion on the Floor of the House, to consider the full disclosure to Hillsborough families, unredacted and uncensored, of all Government-related documents, including Cabinet minutes. The release is a matter of enormous importance to the bereaved families of the 96 people whose deaths were caused on that day and to the survivors of the disaster.

I was one of two Ministers who called for full disclosure and publication of all existing documentation relating to the Hillsborough disaster on the 20th anniversary of the tragedy in 2009, along with my right hon. Friend the Member for Leigh (Andy Burnham). The incredible show of solidarity and dignity at the Anfield memorial, which I also attended that year, as well as the chants for justice that interrupted my right hon. Friend's speech on that occasion, led to the establishment of the Hillsborough independent panel. To achieve that, my right hon. Friend and I were able to push behind the scenes in government to overcome some obstacles in Whitehall, although in my view the terms of reference leave a little to be desired. I hope the process, ably led by the Bishop of Liverpool, who knows what a dark shadow the tragedy still casts across the city, will finally bring everything that can now be known and every document that now exists, 22 years after the event, into the public domain, unredacted by officialdom.

I thank the Home Secretary for her positive and clear commitment to full disclosure this evening. The Prime Minister and Deputy Prime Minister have agreed to the release of all documents and it is of enormous importance that Parliament should vote to call for unredacted and uncensored release and publication of all Government papers, including Cabinet minutes and papers.

 [Column 684](#)

I believe that the Hillsborough disaster and the circumstances surrounding it are a unique case that justifies unique action. Let me briefly set out why. The Hillsborough disaster was not an accident. It could and should have been avoided. It was caused by a failure of police control: that was the finding of Lord Justice Taylor in his interim report just four months after the disaster. Why, then, do so many people still talk of hooliganism?

South Yorkshire police failed spectacularly in their duty on 15 April 1989, but rather than admit it they spent years trying to blame the Liverpool fans who attended the match and the victims for what had happened. That was an orchestrated, sustained and deliberate campaign to blacken the names of the victims and of Liverpool supporters who attended on that day to enable South Yorkshire police to evade their responsibility. As a consequence, the Hillsborough families have had to endure one of the most disgraceful campaigns of official skulduggery, hostility and lies of any victims' families whom I know. It began on the day of the tragedy and continued for years and even now it has left families feeling understandably distrustful and suspicious of officialdom.

South Yorkshire police's failure to accept responsibility and their ongoing efforts to deflect blame, which lasted for years after Taylor's verdict, mean that there are huge amounts of misinformation, which the families keep having to correct. Twenty-two years after the event, the families should not still be having to defend their relatives who died from the lies and innuendo that appear every time the disaster is discussed in the public arena. It is as well to remember that one of the first things that senior officers in charge on that day did was lie about why the gates at Leppings Lane were opened, in order to cover up their culpability.

Inexcusable police behaviour continued on that day. Police refused to allow ambulances that might have saved lives into the ground because they were treating it like a riot, not a disaster. They treated families who arrived on the scene to look for missing relatives as if they were criminals. They blood-tested the dead for alcohol—even children—but there was worse to come. South Yorkshire police briefed *The Sun* that the victims had caused the crush and that fans who merely sought to assist the injured and dying were stealing from them and urinating on them—vile and untrue smears that heaped appalling distress on top of unbearable sudden bereavement. It is about time we knew who gave those stories to *The Sun* and I join the families today in calling on News International to tell us.

Column 685

As if that were not enough, South Yorkshire police quickly established what I referred to in a debate in this House in 1998 as a “black propaganda” unit, which systematically set about altering police statements in an attempt to influence Lord Justice Taylor's inquiry into the causes of the disaster. My right hon. Friend the Member for Leigh read from one of them; I have read them all. This was no less than a conspiracy to pervert the course of justice. One cannot read all the statements, amended, unamended and annotated by police lawyers and police, and come to any other conclusion. It failed mainly—and really only—because they did not have time to complete the job and unamended statements were sent to Taylor. Taylor then gave his finding, but instead of taking notice of Lord Justice Taylor's clear finding and his equally clear rebuke, South Yorkshire police kept the black propaganda unit in place and simply set about persuading the South Yorkshire coroner of their story, preferring to try to engineer historical revisionism rather than to face up to the fact that they were at fault and found to be at fault by the Taylor inquiry.

Despite all that disgraceful behaviour, the chief constable did not resign. The two senior officers in charge on that day were retired on medical grounds and with large pensions to avoid their having to face disciplinary action. No one responsible has ever had to account for the loss of control on that day or for the extended quite despicable behaviour that followed for years thereafter. Indeed, one member of that black propaganda unit, responsible for the smears, is a serving chief constable to this day: Sir Norman Bettison. No wonder the families are suspicious of officialdom, no wonder they do not ever quite believe that what they are told will happen will happen and no wonder they want Parliament to support them by voting for them to see all

documents unredacted and uncensored. I believe that a vote in this House for full publication will strengthen the hand of the Hillsborough independent panel in any discussions that it might need to hold with the Government about ultimate publication of all the material produced to it.

Although prompted by the Government's reaction to the Information Commissioner's ruling that Cabinet minutes should be produced, this important debate will allow Parliament to make its views clear, on a votable motion, about what it expects to be disclosed. Parliamentarians should take the chance to say clearly: we are with the families, who must see everything, and there must be no more suspicions of sinister official manoeuvring to prevent the full truth of the disaster from coming out, as there has been too much of that. That is all the families want and we must help them to get it by voting in favour of this motion.

🕒 7.16pm

Graham Evans >

(Weaver Vale) (Con)

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I congratulate those who have campaigned so effectively to secure this debate. Specifically, I pay tribute to the hon. Member for Liverpool, Walton (Steve Rotheram), who has been a feisty campaigner on this issue. I know that many of my constituents are grateful for his efforts, as am I. I also pay tribute to the families of the 96 who have made the journey down today.

I am grateful for the opportunity to speak in this debate and I am particularly anxious to do so for several reasons. First, I am a passionate football fan. I am a lifelong Manchester United supporter and a former season ticket holder, and I have gone to watch a huge number of games in my lifetime. I have stood on windswept terraces, inside the so-called "cages", and I have seen at first hand some of the appalling crowd management by both police and ground staff at stadiums. To my mind, this really was the definition of a disaster waiting to happen. As my hon. Friend the Member for Liverpool, Walton said, there but for the grace of God go I.

Since the tragedy at Hillsborough, we have come a long way, with all-seater stadiums, greater police planning and much smarter ground management and layout. Clubs have also taken on much more responsibility and have recognised their duty to improve safety. It is vital, however, that we learn all the lessons and get all the facts so that we avoid such appalling tragedies happening again. I still go to watch Manchester United as often as I can and now my children are starting to get old enough to come with me. I want to ensure that we have learned the lessons of Hillsborough so that my children will be able to enjoy the unique magic of match day in the safest possible environment.

The second reason I am so keen to speak is that I have been contacted by a large number of constituents who have urged me to support the campaign to release all documents. I am the only Member of either coalition party to represent a seat on the Mersey estuary. A substantial proportion of my constituents, especially those living in Runcorn, are originally from Liverpool, or, at the very least, their parents are from Liverpool. Many are die-hard Liverpool fans. Many have friends or family who were affected by the tragedy and they want to make certain that the full facts are made available so that bereaved families get the full picture and we can fully understand what happened.

I share the wishes of my constituents and I want to see the papers released. I am pleased that the Government have restated their commitment to full transparency and are happy for the papers to be released as soon as the Hillsborough independent panel decides to do so in consultation with the bereaved families. Given that Cabinet records are normally withheld for 30 years, I think that shows the Government's real dedication to openness in this case and their willingness to help resolve any unanswered questions. I also agree with Margaret Aspinall, chairman of the Hillsborough family support group, that it is right that the papers are shared first with the families before being released to the wider public.

📄 [Column 686](#)

Although it is important that the documents are released, they are only a small part of the truth about Hillsborough. It is essential that the Hillsborough independent panel, which is expected to examine up to 2 million documents as part of its extremely important work, considers all the facts. We must recognise that that is no easy task and we should be patient, but we need to have the truth. I look forward to the panel's eventual report and to the release of the Cabinet papers. I remember that fateful day in April 1989 as though it were yesterday and I hope that I never see such a tragedy again.

Column 687

🕒 7.20pm

Mr George Howarth >

(Knowsley) (Lab)

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Every weekend, hundreds of thousands of people attend public events, including many sporting events. They leave their homes in the not-unreasonable expectation that those who are responsible for the management and safety of those events will do their jobs professionally, thoroughly and properly, and that all the experience available will be brought to bear in those situations. What they do not expect is that if something does go wrong, as things do occasionally at events, any victims will be turned into villains. At the heart of the continuing problem that the families, I and many Members have about what happened at Hillsborough is that that is exactly what happened—there was an attempt to turn the people who were victims, in the ways described by my hon. Friend the Member for Liverpool, Walton (Steve Rotheram), into villains.

My hon. Friend spoke movingly and eloquently, and I think that he spoke for the whole House. His speech was thorough and covered all the events, problems and things that have gone wrong since, but what he did by reading out the names of the victims was to bring things back to the human scale. I want to do that now by mentioning two people who were constituents of mine at the time—they have since moved—Mr and Mrs **GRO-A**. They lost a son, **GRO-A** who has been named by my hon. Friend, and I had a lot to do with them in the early years after the tragedy occurred. They would not want to be seen as being any different from any of the other families concerned, but I single them out because they typify the dignity with which people have responded to the loss of loved ones.

I mention Mr and Mrs **GRO-A** because it was at their request that I attended a day of the inquest hearings, at which I was appalled. It was clear from the way those mini inquests were handled that the whole event seemed to be geared up to proving how much or little alcohol was in the blood of those who had been killed in that tragic and awful disaster. I note that there is a whole debate to be had about mini inquests, but it might be best to have that debate on another occasion. Is it any surprise that those people who had lost loved members of their families at Hillsborough were offended when, on top of the attempts to turn the victims into villains, they found that the inquest, which was supposed to be about establishing cause of death—nothing more than that—seemed to be a perpetuation of that calumny?

Maria Eagle >

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It was.

Mr Howarth >

🔗 Share

Indeed—it was.

I congratulate my right hon. Friend the Member for Leigh (Andy Burnham) and my hon. Friend the Member for Garston and Halewood (Maria Eagle) on the role they have played in bringing about the release of all these documents, and I welcome, I think, the statement that the Home Secretary made today. As I understand it, she has said that all documents, including Cabinet

minutes, will be made available and that nothing will be withheld from the glare of public scrutiny. If that is what she was saying, I very much welcome that. I followed her comments carefully and that appears to be what she said.

I want to make a slight qualification about the process of redaction. The Home Secretary will be aware that, wearing another hat, I sit on the Intelligence and Security Committee. When we produce annual reports or any other kind of report we use the process of redaction, which is necessary because issues of national security are sometimes involved. However, I am aware that redaction causes suspicion. What is left out gives the media vent to speculate about what might have been in there. In this particular case, the families who want to know everything, and rightly so, might feel that something has been excluded. The point I want to make to the Home Secretary is that more thought needs to be given to how that process is to be conducted, who is to be involved in it and who will have the final veto. The default position should be to have no use of redaction unless there are issues of personal medical evidence or of data protection to consider. Data protection should not be used to protect those who may have been culpable of failing in their duties, but other issues of data protection, including in relation to the families themselves, might be relevant. There should be redaction only in those circumstances, and even then each decision should be open to question by the families and the independent panel.

 [Column 688](#)

Mrs May >

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It might be helpful if I clarify these issues and respond to the points that the right hon. Gentleman has made. As far as Government papers are concerned, there will be no redaction by Government. Those papers will be available to the independent panel and it will be up to the panel to decide whether there should be any redaction. Having spoken to the panel I know that its view is that redaction should be minimal, but it will wish to discuss with the families the possible redaction of some personal information relating to the victims. I hope that everybody making papers available to the panel will follow the Government's lead in ensuring that there is no redaction in those papers.

Mr Howarth >

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I am very grateful to the Home Secretary for that clarification, but I still make the point on redaction that there needs to be some thought about how those three different groups, including the Government, will handle that process. I welcome the fact that she said, I think, that the default position should be to publish rather than redact and I hope that that process prevails.

I shall conclude now because I know that many others want to speak. The most important thing for those who have lost loved ones is that light should be shone into all the dark corners that so far have not been revealed, and I hope that the process will do that. I know that nothing can bring comfort in bereavement, particularly given that so many of those who died were so young, but I hope that families will at least feel vindicated in having defended the reputation of their family members and of those who were, collectively, so badly smeared at the time.

Several hon. Members

 [Share](#)

rose—

Madam Deputy Speaker >

(Dawn Primarolo)

 [Share](#)

Order. Given the time we have for this debate and the number of Members who have indicated that they wish to speak, I am going to change the time limit on Back-Bench contributions to 12 minutes, starting with the next speaker. I think that will balance the debate for us.

 [Column 689](#)

 7.29pm

I rise to speak in this debate with a heavy heart but delighted that the hon. Member for Liverpool, Walton (Steve Rotheram) was able to secure it. I was proud to put my name to support the Backbench Business Committee and to the motion today.

The hon. Gentleman's was a very moving and powerful speech. I am sure that I am not the only one who felt myself go, and I commend him for his composure when he bravely delivered the names of the 96 people who died either on that day or later. He voiced the anger, the frustration and perhaps the hope as well of many Liverpool fans and families, not just the fans from Liverpool and Merseyside, but those from across the country and, indeed, from around the world.

We all know that warm words will never bring back those 96 people. However, I hope that warm words and the clear actions that will result from the motion today will bring some comfort to those people who agonised on 15 April 1989. It was not one of those things where someone had to be there to understand how it affected people, particularly in Liverpool. We have heard compelling eye-witness commentaries today from the hon. Members for Halton (Derek Twigg) and, indeed, for Liverpool, Walton. I remember that it hit home at the school assembly on the Monday morning, when we were asked to pray for someone who had died who was a pupil at our school. That, again, twisted the knife ever further, and I did not even particularly know that person.

I intend to try to keep my comments short, so I will not mention all the contributions that have been made, but I thank the right hon. Member for Leigh (Andy Burnham), who spoke so eloquently as well. I am unusual perhaps in being a red in the Coffey family—the rest of them are blues—but we are nevertheless united in our determination to see that justice is done today and in the future.

The right hon. Gentleman was eloquent in referring to the fact that there were deficiencies in the terms of reference set out in the 2009 report. I am delighted that he was gracious to have mentioned that, great achievement though it was, it is good to bring this back to the House today. Indeed, I am sure that there might have been nervousness when the motion was tabled. Officials and Cabinet Ministers, as perhaps happened back in 2009, may have fed one another's anxiety that releasing Cabinet minutes and documents before the end of the time limit under the 30-year rule might not allow free discussion in future.

Perhaps that nervousness was triggered by the advice given and discussions that took place on the Iraq war—indeed, there is perhaps anxiety about information yet to be fully disclosed—but I pay tribute to my right hon. Friend the Home Secretary. I was pleased to hear her words today that no stone will be left unturned and that full, unredacted papers will be provided to the panel. That is really important because, as has been eloquently described today, there is still a feeling of cover-up—the feeling that people are willing to make smears to cover up their own failings at the time. I am reassured by the determination of the House and the Government to ensure that the Hillsborough independent panel and the families have access to the information that they deserve.

I have a question that I appreciate my right hon. Friend the Home Secretary cannot answer now. I encourage her to ensure that the panel has the full time to be able to do its work. The Bishop of Liverpool has recently recovered from illness, but he is also leading another panel that is due to report to Parliament within the next six months, so I should like to encourage my right hon. Friend to make certain that the secretariat is appropriately staffed to make sure that there is no delay in ensuring that the more than 2 million documents are gone through at a good pace, so that people hear the truth as quickly as possible.

I support what my hon. Friend the Member for City of Chester (Stephen Mosley) said earlier about the BBC. It was kind of someone from the BBC to phone me to talk about why the BBC is continuing to press the Government on the appeal. I agree with my hon. Friend, and I say to them now that they should ensure that the process can go ahead unhindered, but it should wait its turn until the families have seen what information is held.

I have a final plea to football fans everywhere. It is not often that I support Sir Alex Ferguson, especially as people will realise the rivalry between Liverpool and Manchester United, but I really do support what he said the other day: the time has come to end the vile chants about Hillsborough and—dare I say it the other way?—about Munich. I call upon premier league clubs to ensure that they do everything that they can to show that those vile chants should be treated as though they were racist chants. The clubs should hunt down the people doing these vile things—they might not realise how much it turns the knife again and again in the families and fans of our club—and ensure that those people are kicked out of football for good.

Madam Deputy Speaker, 15 April 1989 will never be forgotten in Liverpool. It will never be forgotten in people's hearts. That will continue, as the hon. Member for Liverpool, Walton said—so it should—but with the disclosure of information and the publication that will finally come, I hope that we can at least show people that the truth will be outed and that there is nothing to hide from the truth. We must ensure that those people who walked along the Leppings Lane will never be forgotten, and they never will be in the House.

🕒 7.34pm

Mr Clive Betts >

(Sheffield South East) (Lab)

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First, I apologise to you, Madam Deputy Speaker, and to my hon. Friend the Member for Liverpool, Walton (Steve Rotherham) for being late to the debate. I am sorry that I did not hear his introductory speech. I was chairing a Select Committee meeting, which I could not get out of. I came in for the comments of my hon. Friend the Member for Halton (Derek Twigg). I thank him for what he said about the people of Sheffield and how they responded to people who were leaving the ground on that day. We have to remember that it was an era before mobile phones. People were desperate to make contact with families and friends. Houses were opened up; people were welcomed in; phones were used and cups of tea were made. That was felt by the people, and my hon. Friend the Member for Liverpool, Walton has expressed similar feelings to me in the past about that.

I was at the game on that day. I was leader of Sheffield city council. Normally, when I went to matches at Hillsborough, I was on the Kop. That day, I was in the directors' box, at the invitation of the club to go to a semi-final; I had been to a number over the years. I remember when things started to happen that, initially, there was a feeling that there might be a bit of disturbance in the crowd. We could see people start some movement. People were trying to clamber over the fences. Eventually, it became apparent that something more serious had happened—an accident of some kind. The thought was that people had been crushed and perhaps fainted. It took an awful, long time for even people sitting there watching the events to realise the horror of what had actually happened. Initially, we were told that 60-odd people had died. Then it became more, of course, as the events unfolded.

I remember simply going back to the directors' box, being kept abreast of events and just simply sitting with the directors and one or two friends who were there and crying. What else could we do? This was in our city, in my football ground: 96 people had died before our eyes. What else could we do? Next morning, I went back to the ground, after the Prime Minister had been there, with representatives of the three councils—Liverpool, Nottingham and Sheffield—and the clubs to look at the scene where things had happened, and people simply stood and cried again.

📄 [Column 691](#)

This was a tragedy, of course, above all else for the people who died, for their families, for the people who were injured, for Liverpool as a football club and for Liverpool as a city, but it was also a tragedy for Sheffield and Sheffield Wednesday as well. We went a few days later outside the ground to see the scarves, the flowers and the messages from football fans all over the country. This was a tragedy for football and football fans, and it could have happened to any club and many grounds up and down the country, but it happened there on that day. Therefore, although the tragedy is with Liverpool, there is also a desire in Sheffield to have all this information come out in the open. We want to see it out in the open. We want to see as much information as possible out there, so that people can really believe that the cover-ups are at an end and they can reach their own decisions about that information. There are real concerns about the coroner's inquiry and the artificial cut-off point. In my view, that should never have happened. I hope that this might let some light fall on that.

I was a member of the police authority as well. I will not go into all the details about the police's actions. That has been covered already. All that I have to say is that, the previous year, I went round when the same two clubs were to play a semi-final at Hillsborough with a senior police officer and looked at the arrangements. My understanding is that they were somewhat different on the day of the disaster than they had been in the previous year.

So, in the end, it is incumbent on us all to make sure that this information is available, particularly for the families and friends and those who were injured to get the certainty that they have lacked all this long time—certainty, when they have not known whether something is there, hidden away, that has not been brought out into the light of day that might better explain exactly what happened, why it happened and whether it could have been avoided and their loved ones could still be alive today if other action had been taken.

I am doing my small part. I have already been approached by the panel. I have papers in the Sheffield archives that I understand are classified as my personal papers, but they relate to my responsibilities as leader of the council. Some of them relate to Hillsborough, and I have indicated that I am quite prepared to have all that information in the public domain. It is incumbent on us all to do our small bit to make sure that the information gets out into the open.

 [Column 692](#)

 7.40pm

Chris Heaton-Harris >

(Daventry) (Con)

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May I say how humbling was the address by the hon. Member for Sheffield South East (Mr Betts)? I know that he is a football fan to his very core, and the emotion with which he spoke touched Members on both sides of the House. I congratulate the hon. Member for Liverpool, Walton (Steve Rotheram) on a job well done so far; he has represented his constituency fantastically well, and the people of Liverpool brilliantly, and he deserves great commendation for that.

Like many other Members, I would like to thank the 140,000 people who signed the petition. I very much like this new type of democracy that we are bringing to this place. Democracy evolves, and the fact that this debate is taking place is possibly the best testament to the new process. Obviously, I pay tribute to the families of the 96.

I also want to pay tribute to the right hon. Member for Leigh (Andy Burnham). The passion in his words spoke volumes, and all the work that he, with other colleagues, has put into instigating the Hillsborough independent panel is very much appreciated. I hope that he is satisfied with the words that he heard from the Home Secretary, and with the tone in which they were uttered.

Like everyone in this debate, I can remember exactly what I was doing on 15 April 1989. I was starting a business, and I was in the John Lewis store in Oxford Circus, trying to foist some of my new business's produce on to the customers going by. I knew that some fantastic games of football were about to start, and I kept trying to steal away from what I was hoping to be my new career to catch a few tiny moments of each game. The match should have been, as most

other FA cup semi-finals are, a fantastic game of football, with controversy and memorable incidents on the football pitch, but they should have had to do with football, not what we now remember that date and game for. Twenty-two years later, people really should not still be unable to get the complete truth. How can one learn from the lessons of the past if one is not presented with all the information?

I read the Taylor report, and it is obvious from what many Members have said that there was a complete breakdown in communication in the police. Liverpool fans were magnificent in the way they helped each other on that day, after the tragedy. It is unbelievable that the emergency services were so slow in responding, and that ambulances were kept outside the stadium. Hooliganism played no part whatever; police failure was the cause. Police practice was to blame.

I do not want to reiterate everything that has been said; I want to give a slightly different perspective. The first is from someone I do not know: the Liverpool goal-keeper at the time, Bruce Grobbelaar. I remember reading an interview with him in which he said:

“Two minutes into the game, I was aware of a surge behind me. I saw the movement out of the corner of my eye, and I heard a lot of shouting, a lot of noise.

Column 693

The ball went into that section soon after, and as it was returned, there were voices coming from below me.

As I looked down into the front of those pens, I could see people pressed up against the mesh. The wire was digging into their faces, and people were shouting: ‘Bruce, can you help us, please? We can’t breathe.’

What was I to do? I’m about to take a goalkick in this massive game, but all I could think of was those contorted faces and people crying for help. After clearing the ball, I remember shouting to a steward to do something.

The ball went out and I started bellowing at a policeman standing by a gate to open it. He said he couldn’t and would have to liaise with his colleagues. There was a sense of panic.

When the ball sailed into the crowd for a third time, I could see people being lifted out of those terraces. There were screams and cries all around which I’ll never forget, and I shouted to the policeman: ‘Please open that gate, before it’s too late. Please.’

When the ball went out again I made a bee-line for the ref. I pointed to the scenes behind my goal, and he only needed to look once.

The gate had been opened, and people were beginning to pour onto the pitch. We were six minutes into the game, and he turned to all the players, and said: ‘Right, we’ve got to get off.’”

Members of the House probably do not know that I have been a qualified, active football referee since the age of 12. I was signed up to do that by my dad’s best friend, a football referee of the highest quality. His name was **GRO-A**, and he was the referee at Hillsborough on that day. He is very much on the record about what, in his view, happened behind the scenes. He said that when he attended the police briefing 90 minutes before the game, there was nothing to suggest that there would be problems at the game. There was no reason to believe that there was a problem leading up to the kick-off. When the game got under way, he could see the beginnings of problems at the Leppings Lane end, but there had been problems at that end in previous games—lessons that had not been learned.

When Mr **GRO-A** was eventually told by South Yorkshire police at 3.6 pm to stop the game, the full gravity of the situation simply was not clear, as the hon. Member for Sheffield South East has said. Minute by minute, hour by hour, the horror of what had happened in front of Mr **GRO-A** began to unfold. He was told of the first fatality at 3.40 pm. He said:

“To a certain extent you are shocked and numbed.”

He had gone to referee one of the biggest games of football in his life, and he came away having experienced one of the worst possible situations that can be put before anybody. The corridors and the referee's office were used for first aid, and the majority of people who came into that area were suffering from shock, rather than life-threatening injuries. People simply were not aware, until 3.40 pm, of the extent of the problem outside.

Like many in the House who were present, Mr Lewis called it the blackest day of his life. Twenty years on, like many in this place, he went to the memorial service at Anfield, Liverpool's home ground, and experienced the unbelievably magnificent show of support that probably only the city of Liverpool can generate for its football fans. He completely understands the continuing passion of the families of the 96, and what they have been fighting for.

Column 694

Like many in this House, I love the city of Liverpool. It brings so much to our wonderful country. When one tries to put oneself in the position of the parents and relatives of the people who passed away on that day, it can only lead to demanding the full disclosure of every document, in the method described by Members on both sides of the House. Allow the families of the 96 finally to come to terms with these tragic events.

🕒 7.49pm

Bill Esterson >

(Sefton Central) (Lab)

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May I add my tribute to my hon. Friend the Member for Liverpool, Walton (Steve Rotheram) and commend the families of the 96 for their dignified fight for justice and truth? The families that I have spoken to simply want to know the truth behind what happened that day. I want to tell the story of one family in their own words and raise some of the questions that need to be answered.

My constituent **GRO-A** was at the match. His son **GRO-A** was 18 and he died that day. I shall continue in Barry's own words:

"Having left the ground at around 3.45 I made my way to the Halifax road and hopefully on to the point where we had arranged to meet following the game. I was halfway up the Halifax road when I met up with **GRO-A**'s friend and two others who had travelled with us, asking where **GRO-A** was. **GRO-A**, **GRO-A**'s friend, told me I should expect the worst. He said **GRO-A** had been killed. I turned around and made my way towards the ground. As I passed a telephone box, there were about 100 people wanting to use the phone. I suppose they were wanting to ring home to let their family know that they were safe or to give bad news.

I spoke with a female constable and said to her that I had just been told that our son had been killed in the ground, and she said I should go to the gym which was being used as a temporary mortuary. I made my way there in total fear that what **GRO-A** had said to me was true. Arriving at the gym, I asked a lady where is the temporary mortuary. She pointed me in the direction, which was a few yards away. I knocked on the door and it seemed a lifetime for someone to answer.

It was a policeman who answered. He must have been the biggest policeman that I have ever seen. I realised why he was there: the police must have been expecting trouble. I gave him my name and that of our son **GRO-A** and our address. He said, 'Stand there.' He went in. He must have been away 10 or 12 minutes. On his return he told me that there was nobody of **GRO-A**'s description, which I could not understand as Jason had told me that he had gone into the temporary mortuary and given **GRO-A**'s full details to the police, his name, address and the name of his father, and stated that I was at the game.

I also gave the police officer a description of **GRO-A**. He was wearing a Welsh international rugby shirt but I was told no, he was not there. I wanted to call my wife but I could not remember our telephone number. A police sergeant offered to help. He spoke on my behalf but was told that we were ex-directory."

Mr GRO-A said that his number had never been ex-directory, but he was refused the opportunity to be put through to his wife. He went on:

“It was at this point that a lady a resident of Sheffield, Betty Thorp, kindly offered me help. She offered to drive me around a number of hospitals, looking in hope that Jason was wrong and GRO-A might be in one of the hospitals. I think we visited three hospitals, including a mortuary where we saw a number of police officers sitting on the floor looking shocked, and in the middle of the floor was a pile of clothes about 3 ft high.

Having been looking for GRO-A for about 5 or more hours, I was told to go a police station where they may have some information. This I did and waited for my brother and brother-in-law to arrive. Following this, around 11pm, we were told to go to the temporary mortuary, where GRO-A was all the time. Having identified GRO-A the police wanted certain information from me. Apart from the relevant information, the only interest they had was about alcohol and had we consumed any. I can only think the police needed time to get their story right, though why they would need that time to keep a father away from his dead son I don't know.

Column 695

On leaving the gym with Betty Thorp and leaving the ground to look for GRO-A there were a large number of press. They were shouting over to me, ‘Do you have any comment to make about Liverpool supporters urinating on the dead and stealing from the dead?’”

Those are Barry's own words.

Let us hope that tonight we are a step closer to the full disclosure of the documents that the families need. I have been asked to raise some questions. The families need to be satisfied that they have all the information, otherwise many will wonder whether they know the truth or not. Why did certain things happen? Who took the decisions? What was discussed by police officers? Why were changes made to the notes of junior officers? What discussions took place between politicians? What influence did the culture of the time have? Why were the ambulances not allowed on the pitch? Why were fans pushed back into the enclosure as they tried to escape?

Some of these questions were answered in Lord Justice Taylor's inquiry, but other answers are still needed, and the truth may be different from what was said at the time, and the truth may be different from what is in the Cabinet papers. Did police officers agree a line? Why did the press say that Liverpool fans stole from the dead and urinated on the bodies? Why did *The Sun* vilify the dead and show them and their families such disrespect?

Why was the most experienced senior police officer in South Yorkshire removed from his duties, yet not replaced with someone who understood how to balance safety with control? That person who knew in 1987 to delay the start of the same game was not there in 1989. I attended that game in 1987 and I remember how dangerous it could have been on that occasion. The same thing could have happened that year, but the police preparation was different.

The culture at football matches in the 1970s and 1980s was a disgrace. There was no balance between dealing with football-related violence and antisocial behaviour on the one hand, and public safety on the other. Anyone who watched football at that time experienced the ill-treatment of fans. The vast majority of us who watched football went to watch football, not to engage in violence, but the culture was such that safety was of no interest to those in charge of policing football, so people were pushed back into the central pen as they tried to escape, ambulances were prevented from coming on to the pitch, and the worst of the media lied about the dead and their grieving families.

The families of the 96 need the truth. They need to believe that they have all the facts. If the Government release their papers, they need to release all the papers once and for all. I heard the explanation from the Home Secretary about why the Government will withhold some personal details, but I caution her. The families and the wider community have faced countless obstacles, insults and setbacks—

I am very grateful to the hon. Gentleman for giving way and enabling me to clarify the point. The Government will not withhold any details. Any decision about redaction—and it should be minimal redaction—will be taken by the panel. The hon. Gentleman referred to personal details. It will be for the panel to discuss with the families whether personal details should be redacted, and that decision will be taken jointly. The Government will not redact anything in the papers that they release.

 [Column 696](#)**Bill Esterson >** [Share](#)

I am grateful to the Home Secretary for that clarification. She has made that point three times now, and it is extremely important that she is firm about it. It is the families' perception that matters. They need to have total confidence. That is the point made by my right hon. Friend the Member for Knowsley (Mr Howarth). The families need to have every confidence that the information released is all the information. That is what I am trying to achieve by pushing that point with the Home Secretary.

The families have faced countless obstacles, insults and setbacks as they have pursued their campaign for justice and for the truth, so we need to be very sure that all the information is released and nothing is hidden. Full disclosure must mean full disclosure.

 7.58pm**Mr Frank Field >**

(Birkenhead) (Lab)

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I have been a Member of Parliament since 1979 and I do not think I have witnessed another debate of the quality of tonight's. That says something to the families that were partially destroyed by the events we are recalling, and to the wider community that has kept a constant interest in the issue.

This event has affected my constituency, the town of Birkenhead, more than any other single event that I can recall, so the thanks that Members have registered tonight to my hon. Friend the Member for Liverpool, Walton (Steve Rotheram) come not only from the families—obviously from the families—but from practically the whole of the Birkenhead constituency which, as I said, has been affected by these events and continues to be affected as by no other events that I can recall.

Back in 1963 I was sitting with my grandmother as she died. She was grieving the loss of two of her children 70 years previously. She was of course looking back to a time when it was more common for children to die, and yet she said that she could not bear people trying to cheer her up by saying that she would get over it. She did not want to get over it. It seemed that getting over it would be a denial of the existence and celebration of her children's lives. However, she did know what had happened to her children and so was able quickly to put closure on their deaths.

The families I represent in Birkenhead, and those represented by other Members who have spoken today, have been denied that closure by two indescribable acts of horror that have been inflicted upon them. The first act was the press campaign. To have to cope with members of one's family going off to a football match and coming back from the undertakers is an event that most of us—thank God—will never have to deal with. Trying to grapple with the immensity of what has happened to one's family while constantly having to read attacks in the press almost on them, and certainly on their mates and more widely on their mates in the football club, is an unspeakable horror.

Although the House has at long last come to a mind on what we and the Government should be doing, we do not have the power to compel one of the other big players in the event similarly to make a public apology for what has happened. I hope that one of the messages we send out tonight will be a clear one to News International that it too has a part to play if we are to draw a line in the sand for those families. That seems to me to be the first indescribable horror that was inflicted upon those families.

The second horror has been referred to by other Members. It is 22 years since the events, but only now are we in the position, I hope, to bring closure through complete revelation about what actually happened, if that is what the panel decides. I have attended only one other debate in which those on the Front Benches have stayed for the duration, and that was the Falklands debate. Those who are unfamiliar with our procedures might not understand the significance of that, but it is remarkable not only that the Home Secretary is here but that the Culture Secretary and my right hon. Friend the Member for Leigh (Andy Burnham), to whom people have rightly given credit, and my hon. Friend the Member for Garston and Halewood (Maria Eagle), are also present. I thank my right hon. and hon. Friends for the role they have played in reaching the stage we are at tonight.

I thank the Home Secretary, as many have done, for the diligence she has shown and is showing tonight. My plea to her is that she will keep up that diligence to ensure that all the evidence is made available and that no piece of paper is withheld from the inquiry panel so that no one can whip up any debates in future and claim that we do not know what actually took place. That must include the papers and briefing that were given to Margaret Thatcher when she was Prime Minister, before she made the trip to which my hon. Friend the Member for Sheffield South East (Mr Betts) referred.

None of us can undo those events. None of us can undo the injustice that the families in Birkenhead, in Merseyside and beyond have suffered, but News International can help to draw a line under these events and we, in support of the Home Secretary, can ensure that this is the last inquiry, the last panel and the last effort to put into the public domain all the information so that the families can, like my grandmother, know what happened and can, even if it is 22 years late, begin to grow the scar tissue that will allow them better to face the world, while obviously never forgetting what they have lost.

🕒 8.04pm

Dan Jarvis >

(Barnsley Central) (Lab)

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May I begin by paying tribute to the dignity of the families of the 96 and to my hon. Friend the Member for Liverpool, Walton (Steve Rotheram) for securing today's debate? May I thank my right hon. Friend the Member for Leigh (Andy Burnham), my hon. Friend the Member for Garston and Halewood (Maria Eagle) and many other colleagues for their tenacious pursuit of the release of these files over many years? I know that the people of Liverpool and also the people of south Yorkshire and Nottingham, where I grew up, are proud of the work they have done to secure today's debate. I think I speak on behalf of hon. and right hon. Members on both sides of the House when I say that, having heard their passionate and moving speeches, even more people across the country will be just as proud tonight.

I take this opportunity to congratulate the Government on the introduction of the e-petitions scheme over the summer. I believe that this debate is evidence that we should see petitions not as a gimmick, but as a tool for informing debate on what the public want us to think and talk about. I commend the Backbench Business Committee, chaired by my hon. Friend the Member for North East Derbyshire (Natascha Engel), for its determination that the debate should take place.

📄 [Column 697](#)

📄 [Column 698](#)

I would like to say clearly from the outset that no one in this place should be in any doubt whatever that today's debate is about reconciling a major injustice. What happened at Hillsborough was a tragedy first and foremost for the families, but also for the great city of Liverpool, a city that has come together and shown a unique solidarity over the past two decades that we should all recognise. It was also a tragedy for our police, our politicians and our media, because the myths that my hon. Friend the Member for Liverpool, Walton has described were allowed to surface, fester and, for many, become ingrained as the truth. Today, in this House, we have a chance to put that right. In order for that to happen, we need to know beyond a shadow of a doubt what the Government documents say. Cabinet minutes to briefing papers, speeches and drafts—all need to be given to the independent panel and all must be uncensored and without redactions. Only then can the panel make a full assessment of what happened, who knew what and why they chose to do what they did. I very much welcome the statement that the Home Secretary made tonight.

Fifteen years in the British Army means that I am, sadly, no stranger to the loss of close friends and colleagues. If I learned anything from those difficult times, it is that part of the grieving process for the families involves getting to the truth and knowing all the facts that surround the deaths of loved ones. Although I support the release of any uncensored Government documentation from 1989 to the present day, I wish to make it clear that I believe that it is right, as the Home Secretary and other Members have said, to allow the families to see that information first. It should be the job of the independent panel, in conjunction with the families, to use its discretion over what files should be released into the public domain. I am of the opinion that the release of distressing images of those who tragically died and personal information, such as contact details and medical records, is clearly not in the public interest and would serve only to inflict greater distress on the families.

Sadly, for over two decades we have allowed the families' questions to go unanswered. For over two decades we have allowed them to suffer. I believe that that is unacceptable and falls short of the standards that we in Britain should expect from the police, our media and, yes, our politicians. I was delighted that nearly 100 MPs from nine political parties signed the petition requesting a debate on this issue. It showed the public that we understood the depth of feeling, and my hope is that it shows the families that we as a Parliament are finally serious about securing justice and clearing the names of those who tragically died.

Back in April 1989, I was a Nottingham Forest Junior Red, a devoted supporter of Brian Clough and a great admirer of Kenny Dalglish. I tried my best to get a ticket for the semi-final but I was not able to, so my family and I were spared the ordeal of being present on that fateful day, but the horrors that the fans who were there felt, and the anguish that their families have suffered since, have resonated with people throughout the country.

I believe now that the people have spoken: in just three short weeks over the summer, 140,000 mobilised and signed the petition. The depth of feeling is overwhelmingly clear, and now we have not only the chance but, more important, the responsibility to act. The time has come for the families to have their most agonising questions answered. The time has come for full disclosure. Put simply, the time has come for justice for the 96. I very much hope that the whole House will support this motion.

🕒 8.11pm

Angela Smith >

(Penistone and Stocksbridge) (Lab)

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I contribute to this debate today as a season ticket holder at Hillsborough stadium. Every time I attend a match, I walk in through the Leppings Lane entrance to the stadium, to the South stand, and, every time I walk under the shadow of what is now known as the West stand, the

📄 [Column 699](#)

Leppings Lane stand, I remember and think about the 96 who died. It is impossible not to. Every time one visits that ground, one finds it impossible not to think of what happened there that fateful day.

I also live in Hillsborough so the stadium is very much a part of every day life, and anybody who knows the area knows that the stadium is at the heart of Hillsborough and impossible to avoid. Every time I drive past the stadium into town, I pass the memorial to the 96, and every time one passes the memorial, even to this day one finds it covered with red and white scarves and flowers, as a tribute to those who died. I, as a citizen of Hillsborough, am therefore constantly reminded of the pain and suffering that must be felt by the families and loved ones of those who died.

Sheffield Wednesday fans and the people of Hillsborough will never, ever escape the memory of what happened that day, or the events and their consequences. Nor would they want to, and I want to put on the record tonight the fact that the people of Sheffield and, in particular, Hillsborough stand in solidarity with the people of Liverpool over what happened that day.

My old constituency office was the next to the walled garden in Hillsborough park which stands as a further memorial to the 96. It is a lovely, tranquil place, and walking through the entrance one is told, "You'll Never Walk Alone". That, more than anything else, stands as a tribute to the dignity and enduring determination of the families of the 96 to secure justice and accountability for what happened that awful day.

Although I, like many right hon. and hon. Members, was not at the stadium that day, I can still vividly remember watching the television and witnessing the unfolding of a tragedy, the like of which had not been seen before at an English football stadium. At the time it seemed unbelievable that it could be happening at not only one of the most important matches of the season, an FA cup semi-final, but importantly at what was seen at the time as one of the best stadiums in the country.

The stadium was also at the time one of the largest in the country and could at that point hold about 55,000 fans. It had been used on numerous occasions by the FA to host major matches, including many previous semi-finals, and reference has already been made to the previous semi-final, involving Liverpool and Nottingham Forest, at Hillsborough, when Liverpool emerged 2-1 winners.

The ground had also been used during the World cup of 1966, when a number of group matches as well as a quarter-final were held there, and it was for that tournament that much of the ground was redeveloped, with the Leppings Lane end, where the Liverpool fans were located on that fateful day in 1989, gaining a new stand and terrace, with a capacity of about 14,000.

To the north end, the revolutionary 10,000-seat cantilever stand had been erected, and a further development in the mid-1980s was a roof on the massive Spion Kop, on the east side of the ground, which at the time could house up to 21,000 fans standing. The importance of that point is that Liverpool FC, given that it had a far greater proportion of fans wanting to attend the match that day, had objected quite vociferously to their not being allocated the Spion Kop at the match.

In nature, the stadium was typical of many major English football grounds at the time, and indeed its layout was similar to that of Aston Villa's Villa Park and Manchester United's Old Trafford. My point is that, given that the stadium was one of those with the highest standards in the country, it is absolutely unbelievable that Sheffield Wednesday did not have a safety certificate for it. That alone tells us a great deal about the standards in football at the time, and we should never forget that.

In this contribution, I do not want to go into the detail of the events that day, because my hon. Friends the Members for Liverpool, Walton (Steve Rotherham) and for Sheffield South East (Mr Betts) told us what happened that day in incredibly moving and, in fact, heartbreaking detail.

 [Column 700](#)

We do not therefore need to go over that ground again, but, as many other hon. Members have said, after 22 years the families of the 96 who died that day need to know the full story.

Now it is right that all the papers relating to the events before, during and after the tragedy are released, and I welcome the Home Secretary's statement to that effect. Tonight, my hon. Friend—my friend both inside and outside the Chamber—the Member for Sheffield South East has set a very good example by stating that he will release any documents in which he was involved as leader of the city council at the time, and I hope that the other individuals and agencies involved will do the same.

Within days of the disaster, Lord Justice Taylor was appointed to conduct an inquiry, which sat for 31 days and published two reports: an interim report, which laid out the events of the day and offered immediate conclusions; and a final report, which made general recommendations on football-ground safety.

Taylor's immediate conclusions laid the blame on two main things, and I make no apology for going over this again because we need to nail once and for all the lies that have been told about what happened that day. The report noted that, although Hillsborough was considered one of the best grounds in the country, the small number of turnstiles at the Leppings Lane end—anybody who knows the area will know that access to the ground is fairly restricted—and the poor quality of the crush barriers on the terraces were a contributing factor to the tragedy, but Taylor also stated clearly that the official cause of the disaster was a failure of police control.

 [Column 701](#)

Owing to the small number of turnstiles, it has been estimated that it would have taken until 3.40 pm to get all ticket holders—that is the key point: all ticket holders—on to the Leppings Lane terrace, so a decision was taken to open an exit gate. It is important to recall, too, the report's conclusion that the total number of fans entering the terrace was no more than the total capacity of the standing area, but because fans entering the terraces headed for the central pens, 3 and 4, as directed by the large notice pointing them that way above the tunnel underneath the Leppings Lane stand, those pens became seriously overcrowded.

Normally, a police officer or steward would have directed fans away from stands 3 and 4 because they were full, but on that day this did not happen; there were no stewards in the area. The official capacity of pens 3 and 4 was about 2,000, but the report estimated that over 3,000 people were in these pens shortly after kick-off at 3 pm. It was this overcrowding that caused the fatal crush.

However, it was the process of the inquests into the deaths of those who died that has proved most controversial to the families of the bereaved. For some reason that we have yet to discover, the coroner, Dr Stefan Popper, decided to limit the main inquest to events up until 3.15 pm on the day of the disaster, his rationale being that all the victims were dead by that time. This decision has, quite rightly, angered the families of the victims, many of whom felt that this meant the inquest was not able to consider the response of the police and the other emergency services after that time. The inquest returned the well-known verdicts of accidental death on the victims.

The lack of rigour at the original inquest, coupled with the appalling attack on Liverpool fans by *The Sun*, means that the appalling loss suffered that day has been made immeasurably more difficult to deal with for the families of those who died. It is little to be wondered at that so many members of the families affected are here today, for they feel that justice has not been done, in the sense that those responsible for what happened that day have still not been held to account. That is why we must have full and unredacted disclosure of all the documents held by the Government relating to the tragedy. We must know what briefings were prepared and delivered to Margaret Thatcher and her Government at that time, and we must know precisely who briefed *The Sun* with information that was not only grossly inaccurate and untrue but deeply damaging and offensive to the families of the 96 who died.

My hon. Friend is making an incredibly powerful case. I rise to ask this question precisely because she is not a Liverpool MP. Throughout the 1980s, the city of Liverpool and the people of Liverpool were demonised and mischaracterised with an almost McCarthyist fervour, not only by News International but by the media across the board. Does she think, as I do, that that deliberate, ugly, grotesque mischaracterisation led to the attitudes that informed not only the media coverage but a lot of the other actions surrounding these events?

Angela Smith >

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I absolutely concur with my hon. Friend. Indeed, as my hon. Friend the Member for Liverpool, Walton said, the Liverpool fans were no better and no worse than any other fans up and down the English football league. There was no reason to single out Liverpool fans as being particularly prone to hooliganism or violence of any kind; they are the same as any other fans in the country.

I finish by referring to the one positive legacy of the Hillsborough tragedy: the implementation of the Taylor recommendations relating to all-seated stadiums at the top levels of English football. This development has benefited the game enormously, making it much more attractive for spectators, as far as women and children are concerned. It has made the experience of watching football much safer all round. There are some out there who would bring back so-called limited standing. To that suggestion, we need to deliver a resounding no. We must never forget the 96 who died, and we must deliver accountability for the actions of those who were primarily responsible for the disaster, but we must also respect the memory of what happened, and one of the best ways of doing that is to ensure that it never happens again.

 8.23pm

Luciana Berger >

(Liverpool, Wavertree) (Lab/Co-op)


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We have already heard, in the eloquent speeches made by many hon. Friends, moving tributes to the families of the 96 victims. I want to recognise the tireless work that so many have done to get us to where we are today. I pay tribute to my right hon. Friend the Member for Leigh (Andy Burnham) for the work that he did as Culture Secretary to secure the release of documents and to establish the independent panel; to my hon. Friend the Member for Garston and Halewood (Maria Eagle) for her role in calling for the release of the documents; and to my hon. Friend the Member for Liverpool, Walton (Steve Rotheram), who, since being elected to this House, as he did before, has relentlessly pressed and campaigned for the publication of all documents. To the 140,000 people who signed the petition, I say thank you for ensuring that we are having this debate today—but it should not have taken so long.

None of us needs reminding of the events of that dark, dark day 22 years ago. Those dreadful scenes from Hillsborough will never be forgotten in Liverpool; they cast a permanent scar across the city and on Merseyside. What happened on that fateful afternoon was a tragedy not just for the people of Liverpool but for our whole country.

Growing up in Wembley, north-west London, I commemorated the disaster every year. Two of the 96 people who lost their lives were Sarah and Victoria Hicks, sisters aged just 15 and 19, Sarah studying chemistry at Liverpool university, Victoria still at school—the same school I went to. I and many others spent hours on a bench dedicated to their memory in the rose garden at our school. I met Jenny Hicks, Sarah and Victoria’s mother, at the 21st anniversary memorial service at Anfield. She is so brave. Jenny Hicks, her family, and all the families are so brave, and they have suffered enough. Their dignified and unwavering campaign for justice is an inspiration to us all.

I want to read a few words from a moving letter sent to me by one of my constituents:

 [Column 702](#)

“Everyone in the House of Commons has known private grief and experienced the same patterns of raw emotion. It is incumbent on all of you to recover from your memories those feelings which possessed you at the time of your grief and loss, and project yourselves into the unimaginable torment of living, in that condition, not for twenty-two days, or twenty-two weeks, or twenty-two months, but for twenty-two-years; in an unrelieved cloud of unknowing, tormented by the sure and certain knowledge that the facts, which alone, can end their private agony, have been sealed up against them, locked away by an indifferent and heedless power, that refuses to discuss the motives and purposes which drives its actions.

Column 703

For twenty-two years, the immediate and extended families of the ninety-six victims of the Hillsborough disaster have endured the unendurable. With no comfort but their inmost resources and the solidarity of their friends, who, as the petition has shown, are no longer counted in handfuls but in Legions.”

For too long, these families have suffered without the truth. The actions taken by a few during and after that day have made their burdens even more difficult to bear. From the attempts at a cover-up to the desire to depict fans as the authors of their own disaster, so many scandals have been perpetrated against them. As my right hon. Friend the Member for Leigh wrote, an orchestrated campaign was conducted to place the blame for what happened on the victims rather than the authorities. Senior police officers lied about why the gates at the Leppings Lane terrace were opened, blaming Liverpool fans for forcing through them when in fact it was the authorities who had opened them. Ambulances which could have saved lives were refused entry into the ground. Police officers were ordered to change their accounts of what had occurred to cover up mistakes. A national newspaper printed lies about fans who were trying to save lives, disgracefully accusing them of stealing from victims and attacking police. Despite the Taylor inquiry finding that the police were at fault, not a single officer responsible for the conduct of the police that day has been disciplined. It simply is not right.

Twenty-two years later, it is hard to believe that so many questions remain unanswered. That is why it is imperative that all documentation is released, first to the independent panel and the families, and then what is appropriate to the public. I am grateful that the Home Secretary has clarified that the Government will not hold back any documents, because the independent panel and the families need everything—including all the Cabinet minutes, documents and papers relating to the Hillsborough disaster, right through to the present day. There is much speculation about what may have been said, done or written, including in correspondence between Douglas Hurd and Margaret Thatcher. The families will continue to be haunted by the speculation until everything is released. I echo the request of my right hon. Friend the Member for Leigh that the release of all information from private companies, specifically from News International, be included.

Today, all of us in this place owe it to every family who are suffering to put right what was done wrong and to ensure that the unredacted truth is unequivocally released, so that we can finally see what has taken far too long: justice for the 96.

🕒 8.29pm

Stephen Twigg >

(Liverpool, West Derby) (Lab/Co-op)

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It is a pleasure to follow my constituency neighbour, my hon. Friend the Member for Liverpool, Wavertree (Luciana Berger), who has made one of a number of extremely powerful speeches in tonight’s debate. May I apologise to you, Madam Deputy Speaker, and to the House that I had to leave the Chamber for about half an hour earlier in the debate, as a result of which I missed the closing parts of the speech of my hon. Friend the Member for Liverpool, Walton (Steve Rotheram), including the citation of the names of the 96, and the opening of the Home Secretary’s speech?

Column 704

I join this debate with humility, because so many colleagues from both sides who have spoken were present at Hillsborough in 1989, lost friends who died and were among the 96, or have been involved in campaigning on this injustice for all or most of the past 22 years. My qualification is none of those things, but I speak on behalf of constituents in my Liverpool, West Derby constituency, some of whom are here in the Gallery. I welcome them to the House and pay tribute to all the campaigners and family members in the Gallery who have waited a very long time for this debate.

May I join those who have remarked upon how this debate came about? More than 100,000 ordinary people up and down the country asserted people power. I agree with the hon. Member for Daventry (Chris Heaton-Harris) that this is a good way for this House to practise democracy. It gives citizens a greater opportunity to have a direct input into the issues. As my right hon. Friend the Member for Leigh (Andy Burnham) said, it is an indictment of all of us from all parts of the House that it has taken such a long time for this important debate to happen, but happening it is.

I pay tribute to my right hon. Friend the Member for Leigh, as everyone else has done, for the crucial role he played in the Cabinet and now in opposition. In his powerful speech, he made a profound point about the different way in which victims are seen today, compared with 22 years ago, when victims were scapegoated by large sections of the media and in public discourse. As others have said more eloquently and powerfully than I can, people who were living with bereavement and had lost loved ones in recent hours and days had not only to grieve, but to face ludicrous and vile suggestions that their loved ones were somehow responsible for what had happened.

I know that those who are here today from Merseyside will really appreciate the speeches that were made by my hon. Friends the Members for Sheffield South East (Mr Betts) and for Penistone and Stocksbridge (Angela Smith) and the profound sense of solidarity that they expressed on behalf of the people of Sheffield. My hon. Friend the Member for Sheffield South East in particular made an incredibly powerful speech reflecting on his presence on the day and the role that he had at the time. He gave an important commitment at the end about his own papers from his time as leader of Sheffield city council. On behalf of my constituents and, I am sure, of other people who signed the petition that secured this debate, we are very grateful that he has given that important commitment.

This has been a highly dignified, persistent and long 22-year campaign for truth and justice. Like everyone else in this debate, I pay particular tribute to my hon. Friend the Member for Liverpool, Walton, who has been dogged in his persistence, ever since he was elected to this place less than 18 months ago, in seeking this important debate and in giving voice to the feelings of the people of Liverpool in general and of his constituency in particular. He took us to the Backbench Business Committee and mobilised 100 MPs from nine different parties, and it is down to him that we have secured the debate. I pay tribute to him for achieving that.

I also join in the tributes to my hon. Friend the Member for Garston and Halewood (Maria Eagle) who, alongside my right hon. Friend the Member for Leigh, secured in government the setting up of the independent panel.

I do not wish simply to repeat what others have said, but I want to reaffirm some key points that have been made. As others have said, we know that the Taylor report made it clear that the major cause of what happened on that day was a failure on the part of the police, and that hooliganism played no part. I echo what my right hon. Friend the Member for Birkenhead (Mr Field) said in issuing a challenge to News International, *The Sun* and Kelvin MacKenzie, which I hope will come from all parties. We want to see a real, credible apology for what they and other newspapers said and did at the time. Having to endure truly appalling and vile coverage in *The Sun* and some other newspapers made the tragedy so much worse for the bereaved and the people who were suffering.

As has been said, in 2009 the Labour Government established the independent panel. I join others in thanking the Bishop of Liverpool, the Right Rev. James Jones. I know that Bishop Jones and other members of the panel have served diligently in pursuing justice for the 96 and their families.

Right hon. and hon. Members have referred to the many questions that remain unanswered. The 3.15 pm cut-off, ambulances not being allowed in, the decision to change the match commander, the farce of the inquests, police accounts being changed after the event—those are just some of the unanswered questions, to which the families rightly expect to have answers.

As everyone else has said, we warmly welcome what the Home Secretary has said today, particularly her reassurances about redactions. It is only right that full disclosure is made. She gave us the assurance that my right hon. Friend the Member for Leigh sought that such decisions are not for the Government but for the panel and the families. I know that the families and campaigners will also be very pleased that that assurance has been given. As others have said, it is vital that we have that full disclosure, and that we are sensitive to the needs and wishes of the families. As well as the panel having all the documents, it is therefore vital that the families see them before they become available to the wider general public.

Ian Lavery >

(Wansbeck) (Lab)

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A number of Members who have spoken tonight have insisted that documentation from the time of the Hillsborough incident should be released. Does my hon. Friend agree that there is also documentation from before then that should be available? I was personally involved in an incident in exactly the place where the Liverpool supporters were on that day, at a game between Newcastle United and Sheffield Wednesday. I was traumatised by the event. A lot of Newcastle supporters were evicted. They were supposed to have been protesting, but they were fighting for their lives. I lost my shoes and got pushed to the back of the stand—I was lifted off my feet.

It is very important that the police learn from their mistakes, and that they come forward with information that they had previous to the Hillsborough disaster, because it could have been prevented.

Stephen Twigg >

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 Column 706

I thank my hon. Friend for that, and I am very happy to concur with what he says. He has made his case very powerfully, and there may be an opportunity for others to respond to his points later in the debate.

I hope that tonight's debate will mark an important milestone in the 22-year struggle for truth and justice. Many people have contributed to that progress, but like Members on both sides of the House, I want to finish by paying tribute to the families and those who have campaigned. It has taken a long time to get to this stage, but their diligence and persistence is now paying off. From the debate, let us see the progress that enables that campaigning to bear fruit, so that people get the answers to the questions for which they have been waiting for a very long time.

 8.40pm

Rosie Cooper >

(West Lancashire) (Lab)

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I thank and congratulate my fellow former lord mayor of Liverpool, my hon. Friend the Member for Liverpool, Walton (Steve Rotherham), on such a powerful and emotional speech. I also thank my right hon. Friend the Member for Leigh (Andy Burnham), my hon. Friend the Member for

Garston and Halewood (Maria Eagle) and the 139,000 who signed the petition, who all helped to secure this debate.

The Hillsborough Family Support Group—the families of the 96—along with Liverpool fans and players, and everyone associated with the football club, deserve recognition for never giving up in their search for the truth of what happened on 15 April 1989. They have shown such solidarity and dignity in their fight for only one thing: the truth.

As a Liverpudlian who proudly represented my city for 27 years, I now have the great privilege to represent West Lancashire. The Hillsborough disaster is just one of many bonds between my home town and my constituency. Too many people and their families and friends—entire communities—have had to live every single day with the terrible pain of the devastating events of that day. We remember the 96 who lost their lives at Hillsborough and we remember their families, but we also remember those who later took their lives because of what happened, and we remember the survivors, who are grateful to be back with their families, but who live with the emotional and physical scars. Their stories—truly heart-rending accounts—of the day's events are told with such lucidity, emotion and vivid imagery. It is as if it were yesterday rather than 22 years ago. That is probably the most important reason why I support the motion.

Many in the House and in the wider public debate will talk of the failure to heed warnings, of the ground's inadequacies in previous years, of the disgusting and disrespectful media coverage, and of the failure of the police operation on match day. Not just people in Liverpool will closely watch this debate and the Government's subsequent action, and nor is it just a national issue. As Damian Kavanagh reminds us,

“there are many people in far-off places around the world who know the name of Liverpool because of our team.”

The sense of injustice is felt around the world.

I very much welcome the commitment the Prime Minister made in his letter to my right hon. Friend the Member for Leigh, and the commitment given by the Home Secretary today, that the families will see the unredacted papers. That is an appropriate and welcome response. I reiterate the call of my right hon. and hon. Friends for full public disclosure, and I look forward to the House supporting the motion later tonight. A wider community was deeply affected by the Hillsborough disaster. Only through full public disclosure of Government-related papers can we begin to address their sense of injustice.


Many people have contacted me about Hillsborough, and I wanted to give the House just a few examples of the stories that have been told to me. Kevin Wilkie, a constituent, was at the time a 15-year-old boy. He went off to the game with his father and his best friend, like so many others that day. Echoing the story from Bruce Grobbelaar, Kevin recalls that

“a man...was squashed against the crash barrier behind me. He was grabbing me, begging me to help him. I still see his face. The colour in it changes. There was nothing I could do for him.”

Kevin also lost sight of his best friend in the melee. He had become unconscious in the crush but, fortunately, he had been passed over the crowd and out over the fence to safety. He was one of the lucky ones.

Damian Kavanagh, who has written his story for the Hillsborough justice campaign, tells of how he was able to escape from the Leppings Lane end. He tells of how he had cuts on his hands from ripping down the advertising hoardings to create makeshift stretchers. His only other physical injury was a bruise on his back in the shape of a hand—the result of the pressure building up in the Liverpool end of the ground.

Families had a sense of guilt that their loved ones had returned from the game while their neighbours grieved for a husband, father, brother, sister or daughter. In an e-mail sent to me, one constituent said:

 [Column 707](#)

"I didn't lose any relatives or friends on that day but I did lose 96 close friends that I didn't realise I had."

What happened in Sheffield on that day in April had implications that went well beyond Yorkshire. To quote a fan who was present:

"Everybody was affected, everybody knew somebody who had been to the match. This disaster struck at the very heart of our community."

Let us remember that those people did not go off to war. They did not go out with the intention of rioting or fighting, and what happened was not an unforeseen natural disaster. They went as fathers, sons, brothers, sisters and mates to watch a football match—an afternoon of escapism and entertainment at the end of a working week. They were met by an absolutely disastrous failure on the part of officials and the police, followed by malicious stories and lies promulgated by the press. No one has yet been held to account, and no charges have been brought.

I cannot begin to imagine what anyone affected by Hillsborough has felt or experienced in the years since 1989. Loss and grief suffered privately are tough enough, but in this case, the events and the lies have been played out publicly. Their sense of grief and loss has been compounded by a deep and strong feeling of injustice. By any measure of fairness, humanity, justice and truth, the full disclosure of these documents would be demanded. We can never do anything to take away the pain of the families' loss, but, with the publication of all the documents, the Government can begin to heal the pain of injustice. It is long overdue, but it is time for the truth.

Column 708

🕒 8.48pm

Alison McGovern >

(Wirral South) (Lab)

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Let me begin my contribution today by thanking all those Members of Parliament who supported the call for this debate. The Hillsborough disaster occurred when I was eight, but few other events have had such an impact on my life, or that of my community. It is a true honour to represent my home town, and I am thinking today especially of all those who have been affected. I pay tribute to those who have travelled here today to listen to us. My only hope is that we can do justice to their commitment, and live up to their example.

I congratulate my hon. Friend the Member for Liverpool, Walton (Steve Rotherham) on leading the debate today. On the 20th anniversary of Hillsborough, I sat with my family in the Lower Centenary stand at a packed Anfield, and I listened to him lead our mourning as the lord mayor of Liverpool. I was taken aback then at his bravery in describing the impact of Hillsborough on his life, and I was deeply proud of him, although I did not know him. Little did I know that, just over a year later, we would both join this place and become friends—and I am really glad we have.


I also place on record the thanks that many of my constituents have asked me to bring to my hon. Friend the Member for Garston and Halewood (Maria Eagle) and my right hon. Friend the Member for Leigh (Andy Burnham). Their leadership in government led the way to the Hillsborough independent panel being brought into existence, and their support has meant a great deal. I thank the Home Secretary for her words today, which have demonstrated her encouragement of today's motion and full transparency, which is what we want. I thank Members, particularly those from Sheffield, for their contributions today and for their solidarity.

The motion we are debating today is essentially about the truth. That is what we want. For all those affected by events on 15 April 1989, we want to get to the truth—the truth uncensored, the truth without redaction, the truth with no questions left to answer. I want to say on behalf of my constituents why the truth matters so very much. To answer that question, I need to go back to the day itself.

As I said earlier, I was an eight-year-old girl at the time. It was about then that I started to go to football matches and, like many young children, I learned about the wonder of football—the atmosphere, the beauty, the skill on display—and I learned to stay close to my family and not get lost. On the occasion of the FA cup semi-final at Sheffield Wednesday that April, I was at home. Luckily, I was sat in our front room in our house in Bromborough with my dad—and I can still see the look on his face now, because he knew what was happening. Football fans all over Britain knew. They were watching on TV, listening on radios from other football grounds. Thousands and thousands were gripped with horror as bodies were pulled out of the pens in the Leppings Lane end of the Hillsborough ground, and thousands prayed for the safety of those being carried across the pitch on cheap advertising hoardings for stretchers.

The awfulness of that day sunk in over the weeks and months afterwards. It was the worst possible shock. As Alan Hansen, on the pitch playing for Liverpool that day, has said of the disaster,

“the number of broken hearts is incalculable”.

 [Column 709](#)

Sadly, for many I have spoken to over the years, there has been a grim recognition of how this could have happened. In the 1980s, football fans were broadly deemed by some to be scum. The relationship between supporters and the police was frequently poisonous. There was a culture of disrespect for fans.

As the interim Taylor report itself pointed out:

“Over the last few years, hooliganism at and associated with football matches has strongly influenced the strategy of the police. In their plans and management they have concentrated on averting or containing threats to public order...it has led to an imbalance between the need to quell a minority of troublemakers and the need to secure the safety and comfort of the majority.”

Yet this was something new in the scale of the horror. In the weeks that followed, people poured into Anfield to show their respects, and everyone wanted answers. Everyone wanted to know how on earth this could have happened.

Well, from a practical perspective, we do know why 96 people died and hundreds and hundreds suffered. We know it because Members have said it, but I want to say it again for clarity. The interim report of the Taylor inquiry, immediately after the disaster, found that police error allowed too many fans into too small an area of the ground, and an absence of effective leadership exacerbated the suffering caused. Despite problems of ground safety, different decisions could have been taken on that day.

As my neighbour and right hon. Friend the Member for Birkenhead (Mr Field) commented, because of two terrible processes that happened straight away, both in the immediate aftermath and in the years that followed, we are still frozen in those early stages of grief in the awful horror of it all, unable to come to terms with it. That is why we need the truth now. The first awful process was the appearance of stories in newspapers which took the good names of fans who were at Hillsborough on that day and threw them in the mud. One newspaper in particular made untrue allegations of specific behaviour by fans that had simply never happened. Those newspapers took people who were suffering in a manner that few of us here can imagine, let alone have experienced, and ripped apart their dignity. Not only did those affected have to suffer physical and mental injury; they had to witness their honour being attacked as though they were the lowest of the low.

People may recall the pictures of newspapers being burnt in Liverpool at the time, but what they may not know is how those lies have echoed down through the years, and how they continue to be spread. I moved to London in 1999, fully 10 years after the disaster, and I was shocked then by how many people still believed the lies told about Hillsborough. They did not believe those lies out of malice, but because no one had ever corrected them before. On many occasions I have had to explain what actually happened at Hillsborough, why the calls for justice still ring out, and why people will not “just let go”. Even today, we still see horrible claims repeated online, on

websites. Those awful lies, which have been corrected any number of times, are still perpetuated. Often the people whom we correct are quite shocked, having simply assumed that football supporters were to blame.

I join those who support Sir Alex Ferguson's call for the Hillsborough chants to end, which was highlighted by the hon. Member for Suffolk Coastal (Dr Coffey). It is hugely important, and has emphasised the fact that the lies told about Hillsborough still have traction. However, given that not one person has ever paid a significant price for their dereliction of duty on that day—only the fans and the victims have paid that price—why would people think that anyone else was to blame?

That brings me to the second awful process that has brought us here today. Our justice system did not deliver, and has not been seen to provide a just account, for the families of those who died at or because of the disaster. No prosecutions have been brought against those who were responsible, despite the conclusions of the Taylor inquiry. The inquest process was flawed by the provision of insubstantial representation for families, and by a large number of other factors that undermine the authority of the verdict. Most seriously, as others have said, no evidence was considered about events after 3.15 pm on the day, so the actions of the police in the rescue operation, and numerous other crucial details that should have featured in a proper account, were not examined. The scrutiny of the evidence which took place in 1998 was likewise flawed, and private prosecutions did not provide conclusive verdicts.

The truth about Hillsborough has never been fully acknowledged. The truth about the causes of those deaths has not been put fully on the record in the way for which our legal system should allow. That is why, for 22 years, we have stood at Anfield and shouted for justice. It is why this campaign is supported by football fans from all teams, from all parts of Britain—as has been clear from what Members have said today—and indeed across the world. It is why I am trying to explain today why the full truth is so important to so many.

One of the most moving sights at the memorial service is the people who come wearing the colours of teams from far and wide to show their support. In every year that has gone by, our voices calling for justice have become louder. Each year, the numbers attending Anfield on the anniversary are larger. If there is anyone left in the country who thinks that the campaign for justice will just fade away over time, let me tell them that they are very wrong.

In my constituency, Unilever installed a permanent memorial to all victims of the disaster. It sits in a beautiful and peaceful part of Port Sunlight Village, providing another space for reflection and a marker of the indelible effects of 15 April 1989 on our community. The strength of our community, and our commitment to justice, will not fade.

The motion calls for full access to Government papers, unredacted and uncensored. Release of the Cabinet papers—which, thankfully, we have heard the Government support today—is an important step on the road towards a full account, bearing witness to a heartbreaking disaster. No evidence should be kept hidden, even that from the highest levels of Government. What we have asked for today—and, thankfully, succeeded in gaining—is the support of parliamentarians for a full and unrestricted account. Parliament should back this motion because general Government policy has already been changed in that Cabinet papers are kept private for 20, rather than 30, years. We have already waited 22 years for the truth about Hillsborough, and we cannot wait any longer. This is a straightforward matter of letting those affected know precisely what happened—of telling in respect of every locus where decisions were taken, what happened and why. Only then, when we know the truth, can we have justice, and can we hold up an account and say, “This is the truth. This is how our loved ones died. May such a thing never happen again. Their memory will never leave our hearts.”

Column 710

Column 711

🕒 9.00pm

Members often have the privilege of visiting schools, and we are always asked why we wanted to become an MP. I wanted to become one because of nights like tonight, when we have the chance to bring justice and right a real wrong. Another question we are asked is why MPs are called “honourable”. After tonight, I shall always refer people to the speech of my hon. Friend the Member for Liverpool, Walton (Steve Rotheram)—who has been in the Chamber for the past five hours but has just now disappeared. He gave a tremendous speech on a very important subject. One of the points he made was that this could have happened at any football ground in the country. He is right, and I want to refer to some of the things I have seen—my hon. Friend the Member for Wansbeck (Ian Lavery) mentioned many such things in his speech earlier.

On Boxing day, it will be 49 years since I first walked into a football ground. Boxing day 1962 was when I saw my first game, and, sadly, it was the last game that Brian Clough played. About 30 minutes into the game, he was injured very badly. Even though that happened 49 years ago, the memory is still burned into my mind, because football has that effect on us; it hooks us in a way no other game in the world does. It becomes an obsession.

For football supporters, things were very different back in those days. We stood in a huge concrete stand that took 21,000 people. It was uncovered, and the day was freezing cold. The pitch had been covered in straw, and the straw had been pulled back. That was probably one reason why Clough’s injury was so severe. There were at least 50,000 people in the ground for what was a second division match. They were united in wanting to see their team do well. Sadly, as has happened far too often, we got beaten 1-0. I have been a Sunderland fan for many years, and that is a common theme.

Such results do not dampen the passion people feel, however. Regardless of whether they support Liverpool, Everton or any other team in the league, it is their team and their town, and they want to support and get behind them. That passion was there no matter how badly we were trot—and some of the grounds were unsanitary or unsafe, and no other sport would have taken place in them.

If that was the situation back in the early ’60s, how did 96 people get killed so much later on, in one of the grounds that was improved for the 1966 World cup? There is absolutely no doubt that the hooliganism of the ’70s and ’80s influenced the mindset of the people in authority in this country. Their attitude towards the fans was much harder back then. The police in particular believed that their job was to control crowds by getting the retaliation in first. In saying that, I do not in any way excuse the crass and disgraceful behaviour of some people—they besmirched the names of good football clubs—but football was not immune to what was happening outside in those days.

The police were strongly politicised in the 1980s. We had seen riots on the streets of Brixton, Toxteth and Tottenham. We had also seen the dispute at Wapping and the miners’ strike, when ordinary working men, many of them football fans, were declared to be “the enemy within”—a phrase that was mentioned earlier in our debate in relation to the people of Liverpool. Crucially, just four years earlier, we had seen the disaster at the Heysel stadium, as a result of which we ended up with fans literally penned in cages. Was that seen as an overreaction at the time? It was not. People said, “It’s all they deserve. If they are going to behave like animals, let’s treat them like animals.”

 [Column 712](#)

I do not want to move away from the issue of the day, but I wish to make a point about what led to that penning in. What was done by people such as Ken Bates, who put up electrified fences at Stamford Bridge, led to disasters such as this and it is why every football fan in this country sympathises with this issue today.

I could not agree more with my hon. Friend, because he raises exactly the point I am trying to make. Sadly, it was the Liverpool fans who suffered that day but it could have been any of us, because the authorities took an attitude that said, “These people are out of control. We will treat them like animals.” How did they do that? It was okay to herd people into a clearly overcrowded area. It was okay to keep forcing more and more people into confined spaces, despite their objections. My hon. Friend the Member for Wansbeck mentioned what happened to him and I experienced a similar event at the Leppings Lane end in Sheffield in 1968. We could not even get near the turnstiles, but the design of the ground funnelled people into an area. So we were pushed up against police horses and they could not move, let alone the crowd. What stays in my mind from that day was a policeman on horseback flailing with his baton, but he could not move—none of us could move. That took place 21 years before Hillsborough, so a catalogue of events led up to what happened on that day in 1989.

Sir Peter Bottomley >

(Worthing West) (Con)

Sadly, I was at the Heysel stadium. Very few people misbehaved and the resulting problem occurred mainly because most of the Liverpool fans had been crushed together; there were far too many in a small pen. It is a tragedy that the lessons were not learned.

Mr Anderson >

Again, the hon. Gentleman is absolutely right. This was about how we treated football fans, which was different from how any other sports fans were treated in this country or across Europe. That was shown by the fact that when people were trying to escape from these cages, they were penned in—they were actually forced back. They were knocked back by the police, because the police thought that they were trying to invade the pitch for some reason other than to try to save their lives. That would not have happened in any other scenario.

As we have heard so often today, although all of that was a real scandal, just as bad, after the devastation to so many lives, is the way in which this issue has been covered up for two decades and more. It was covered up by the authorities and it was disgracefully covered up by some of the media in this country. The behaviour of *The Sun* has been highlighted today. As a former coal miner, I am not surprised that *The Sun* turns against working people—it has done that for decades and I do not see how it will ever stop doing it. But that does not stop us, and others in this House and this country, from saying that that was out of order, particularly as there was an attempt to sway the conscience and belief of people in this country against ordinary people who were just having a day out supporting their football team.


As far back as 1999, I was working in Liverpool with some social workers, and in the days leading up to the 10th anniversary they were saying to me, “We’ve got to get justice for these people.” I was working with the trade union movement and we tried to move that forward. We had discussions with the then Government but, sadly, despite all our best efforts, nothing happened. We have heard about how the courageous attempts of my right hon. Friend the Member for Leigh (Andy Burnham) and my hon. Friend the Member for Garston and Halewood (Maria Eagle) started to bring some pressure to bear and we did then see movement from the Government some 10 years later.

We are still discussing this issue here today, 22 years down the line, and we hope that we are going to see justice done. We need everything out in the open and we need it now. We do not need some more vague promises of, “Somewhere down the line.” We need to act when the information comes out. It is no good just saying, “This was wrong. That was wrong.” We need to bring people to justice in this country. If it was wrong for them to have done this in 1989, it is right for them to face punishment in 2011, or whenever we can bring them to book. We need to

make sure that we do so because we owe it to the 96. We owe it to the families who lost loved ones and we owe it to all the folks who will go to football games this weekend, because it is about them as well as about the people who went before them.

As has been rightly said, this is about every football fan in this country, because the truth is that football is still the beautiful game. It is a hugely emotive event, a game that does away with any sense of rationality. A person can believe that their team is the best team in the world when, quite frankly, it is not and probably never will be—[Hon. Members: “Speak for yourself.”] Look, I have to get votes in Newcastle. Football is a game that sometimes brings out the best and the worst in all of us who are obsessed by it. The feeling is never less than great and I hope that it never loses that feeling, that passion and that bond between people from all walks of life.

Football brings people together and one of the great experiences of my life is when Liverpool fans come to Sunderland and then come to the village in which I have spent most of my adult life to go to the memorial for Bob Paisley, the most successful Liverpool manager of all time, who was born and bred in the village that I am proud to come from. Bob Paisley’s brother worked with my dad. There is a bond between people who can say that for the next 90 minutes they will shout at each other, saying that they hate one another—that they hate the very life of one another—but can come out and be the best of friends. There is nothing wrong with that and we should be proud of the culture that this country brought to the sporting world 150 years ago. That is something about which we should all be passionate and proud.

 [Column 714](#)

That is the real joy of football. It is miles away from the world of Sky, from the superstars who cannot even be bothered to come on to the pitch when some of us would give our left arm to play once for our team and from the agents who will destroy football if they can get away with it. We owe it to the 96 to ensure that justice is done today. We need to see justice. Failure to do so diminishes our game and our nation and it will diminish this House. We need to get on with it.

 9.11pm

John Woodcock >

(Barrow and Furness) (Lab/Co-op)

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It is great to follow such an impassioned account of football fans’ experience and the beautiful game from my hon. Friend the Member for Blaydon (Mr Anderson). May I also say what an honour it is to sit next to my hon. Friend the Member for Wirral South (Alison McGovern), who made a truly extraordinary speech? I know that we are resolutely not to pay any attention or refer to anything that happens in the Gallery, Mr Speaker—I do not know whether you will strike me down or whether this will merely be struck from the record—but seeing the families and friends of the 96 break into spontaneous applause was quite something. She is a true red and a credit to Merseyside and her team.

It is an honour to be in the House for this debate. It feels like the House of Commons truly has risen to the occasion, bearing in mind the gravity of the responsibility placed on us by the amazing, tenacious and indefatigable campaign from so many seeking justice for the 96 and the truth about what happened on that awful day. I did not intend to speak in this debate, but my hon. Friend the Member for Wirral South suggested that I did. Like many football fans who are Members of Parliament, I look at the tragedy and the way in which the people of Liverpool and the families affected have struggled with this day after day for 22 years and think that it is not my place to speak. My hon. Friend said, and I hope she is right, that football fans across the country should say how solidly we stand behind the people of Liverpool and Liverpool fans in demanding justice and full disclosure after so long.

This is not just about football fans. What happened is an injustice and anybody who wants to see serious injustices exposed, whether they are football fans or not, is behind the call for full disclosure. I know how welcome that is. As has been made clear in the many extraordinary

contributions today, the fact that the Home Secretary has come to the House to confirm that she will make the Government documents available to the panel in their entirety and unredacted is very welcome.

Mark Durkan >

(Foyle) (SDLP)

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My hon. Friend has rightly said that this campaign touches everyone who seeks justice. A group of my constituents have a particular sense of empathy and solidarity with the families of the 96—the Bloody Sunday families, who have developed a very strong bond with those families. In a different way, they can empathise with exactly what families suffer whenever they have to struggle against indifference, injustice and insult and whenever survivors have to endure calumny and are asked by the powers that be, in the media and elsewhere, to carry some of the blame of that day. This issue touches many people, and the families of the 96 have all our hearts.

John Woodcock >

 [Share](#)

 Column 715

My hon. Friend speaks eloquently and his words will resonate with the families and the many thousands who are watching the debate. The kind of resolution that came after so long in the Bloody Sunday inquiry is what everyone here in the House and the many people watching want to see. They want similar closure through access to the full documentation about what happened on the day of the Hillsborough tragedy.

As has been heard today, every football fan knows where they were on that fateful day. I think I am the third Sheffield Wednesday fan among Members to speak today, and I am delighted to follow such excellent and moving contributions from my hon. Friends the Members for Penistone and Stocksbridge (Angela Smith) and for Sheffield South East (Mr Betts). I was a 10-year-old boy at the time of that semi-final, and I note that my dad was serving on Sheffield city council with my hon. Friend the Member for Sheffield South East. On that day I was playing football in the garden of my friend who was a Liverpool fan, and I remember the opening reports talking of a riot having occurred. Quite quickly, we got a different picture, but it was striking and it has stayed with me all this time that there was talk about a riot because that was the assumption—that that was what must have happened and caused the disturbance and the spilling over of people.

One of the most powerful speeches I have heard in this place or elsewhere was that of my hon. Friend the Member for Liverpool, Walton (Steve Rotherham), who put so well how that initial misunderstanding was immediately followed by a campaign of mistruths and lies. Even now, we are still seeking the full truth and the documents that will set out why ambulances were refused entry to the ground. We want to find out what happened with the failings in safety procedures and why Hillsborough did not have a safety certificate. It is good to hear that my club, Sheffield Wednesday, is co-operating fully and I hope that it operates a policy of full disclosure—as should all relevant organisations, whether or not they are covered by the Freedom of Information Act. I hope that all concerned will make available absolutely everything that is required to allow the panel and the families to see exactly what happened.

As 10-year-olds, we are mad about our teams. We are proud of anything that our teams do; it does not matter whether they are any good, which, increasingly, with the fate of Sheffield Wednesday, is probably a good thing. A generation of Wednesday fans and I have grown up with the ground that they love being infamous around the world as a symbol of tragedy. That is a strange thing for any football fan to come to terms with. As young boys, we tried to understand and assimilate the grief that we saw from the football fans around us.

I grew up as a season-ticket holder on the south stand for most of the time and, latterly, on the Kop, sitting next to my hon. Friend the Member for Sheffield South East. I hope that the annual visit of Liverpool FC, which, obviously, does not happen any more, will return one day. Annual

tributes were paid at the Leppings Lane end. The fact that part of the ground will always be synonymous with tragedy is absolutely right, given the gravity of what happened there, which profoundly affected a generation of fans.

It is worth briefly reflecting on the change that has happened in football, largely as a result of the tragedy. Let us remember that the Football Spectators Act 1989 would have required compulsory identity cards and was only repealed as a result of Hillsborough. There have been so many vivid recollections of the horror of that day, which people who were there experienced and others saw on their TV screens. We remember the spikes at Hillsborough in the Leppings Lane end and across the country. It is worth reflecting on just how different the game is now, the improvements that have been made and the change in attitude, which so many hon. Members have talked about today and which was abhorrent at the time. It is absolutely right that we have been able to move on from those days.

Liverpool FC is important in Barrow and Furness, the constituency that I represent. In Barrow, everyone is a Barrow soccer fan. We are in the conference. People tend to have a second team as well, and there are loads of scousers who go down to Anfield nearly every other week—nearly as many reds as go down to Old Trafford, but that is the case wherever we go. One of Liverpool's greatest captains, Emlyn Hughes, was a Barrow lad. He was eventually signed in 1964 by Blackpool, Barrow having passed up the chance to sign him. There is a statue of him in pride of place in Barrow, and he was, of course, at the game in 1989, so I want to end with a simple tribute that was left, along with red roses, at the Emlyn Hughes statue in Barrow on the occasion of the 20th anniversary of the tragedy. Two people who did not give their names wrote a simple note saying:

"In memory of the 96 who lost their lives at Hillsborough on 15 April 1989 from two who were spared that day in the Leppings Lane End. You'll never walk alone."

🕒 9.24pm

Tom Greatrex >

(Rutherglen and Hamilton West) (Lab/Co-op)

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I am grateful for the opportunity to take part in the debate, and I start with a confession: I was one of those—there were close to 140,000 of us—who signed the e-petition. I was not sure whether we were supposed to be able to petition ourselves, but I did it, and I hope that it does not get me into too much trouble.

I want to place on record my appreciation, which I know is shared by many others—everyone in the Chamber and, I am sure, all those listening and watching at home and in the Gallery—for the unstinting dedication and commitment to the issue displayed by my hon. Friend the Member for Liverpool, Walton (Steve Rotherham). He spoke with great feeling and passion in opening the debate, having over the past 22 years been involved in a long campaign for justice for the 96 victims of the events of April 1989.

Many others have expressed their views as fans of Liverpool, as people present at the game on that day, or as people who represent communities and individuals personally affected by the disaster, and we have heard the power of their testimony this evening. We have heard of the impact not only on Liverpool and the surrounding area, but on Sheffield, and one particular part of it that will, as my hon. Friend the Member for Barrow and Furness (John Woodcock) said, for ever be associated with the most senseless, tragic and unforgivable loss of life, when people left their home that afternoon to watch a football match and never returned.

As others have said, in debating this issue we should not forget the context of the time. Football had been scarred by trouble in and around grounds for close to 20 years. Facilities were often poor, owners were often disinterested in their clubs and, I have to say, Government at the time saw football as some sort of national disease, rather than a sport. It is sometimes easy to be

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nostalgic for football in the pre-premiership era, especially when that coincides with one's formative years, but football in the 1980s was alien to many people. It was often unloved, unappreciated and unwelcome.

Thousands of people in this country watch football matches at weekends. They did in the 1980s, too. On 15 April 1989, I was among those who did. Like those at Hillsborough, that afternoon I stood on a concrete terrace, largely unchanged since it was opened decades earlier, with metal crash barriers and high, angled fences between the pitch and the crowd. It was my good fortune that, unlike those people at Hillsborough, I was standing on a terrace that was largely empty. There were 4,949 other people on that day in grounds that were licensed to hold 30,000-odd. All 4,950 people who arrived at Craven Cottage that day left for home alive; that is how it should be at every football match, but that afternoon for 96 people it was not.

Many of us who were at the football on that day left knowing that something had gone terribly, badly wrong in south Yorkshire that afternoon. We were soon to find that football was about to change for ever. I will never forget the sense of emptiness, and of the irrelevance of the spectacle of the match that I was watching, as we stood on the terrace and heard—in those days, it was from people with radios—first that there was a pitch invasion at the FA cup semi-final; then that the game had been held up; then that people were spilling on to the pitch; then that there was a riot; then that people were injured; and then that advertising hoardings were being used as stretchers. It was only over the course of the evening and the next day that the scale of what had happened in Sheffield became apparent. Even then, reports—media reports, briefings from the police, statements from football authorities—all to a greater or lesser extent suggested that the deaths were precipitated by drunken fans, supporters arriving late, or spectators without tickets, or with the wrong tickets.

The undercurrent was obvious: it was the fault of fans—violent thugs who knew no better. The most infamous manifestation of that was the disgraceful reporting in *The Sun* that week, which we have heard about. As others have said, there were made-up quotes, invented incidents and fictional accounts designed to blacken the name of people who were in Sheffield to watch a football match. That is absolutely disgraceful.

Given that background, it is little wonder that the terminology of injustice is used because it is unjust for people to be condemned without evidence. It is unjust to be publicly blamed as culpable of the deaths of those one stood with watching a sporting fixture. It is unjust to be written off by authorities seeking to avoid responsibility. That sense of injustice needs to be addressed today.

As we all know, although Lord Justice Taylor dismissed many of these stories out of hand as baseless, and firmly established the culpability of South Yorkshire police in his report, that sense of injustice remains today. It remains because of the claim by the match commander David Duckenfield that fans forced open the exit gate that led to the crush in the central pen, when that was his own terrible decision. It remains because of the disappearance of CCTV tapes from the control room—tapes showing what happened in the Leppings Lane end of the ground. It remains because of the verdict of accidental death rather than unlawful killing.

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Many others have spoken of various inadequacies and the fact that the police fixation with alcohol seemed to have the upper hand. A sense of injustice remains because of the statement by the then Prime Minister's press spokesman that he had "learned on the day" that the cause was "a tanked-up mob" of Liverpool fans. It remains because of the records of police officers' statements having been doctored by senior officers of South Yorkshire police. It remains because the documents placed in this House seem incomplete—there are no memos between senior police officers, or the police and their solicitors, for example. It remains because of the Government's discussions during those days still not having been released.

That sense of injustice can be righted only by the full and complete disclosure of documents held by the Government, South Yorkshire police and the other relevant authorities. Where doubt remains, that disclosure can help to bring clarity. Where suspicion lingers, that disclosure can

help to bring confirmation. Where there is still grief—I know there is still grief—that disclosure can help people to move towards resolution.

One of the great privileges of being a Member of this House is the opportunity to stand in the Chamber and speak up for what is right. There are countless examples of Members of this Chamber doing that in our history and helping to right historic wrongs. This evening, it is important that the House speaks with one clear and consistent voice. Those who should have been given answers 22 years ago, who feel the pain every day of their lives, who are here today and watching the debate in such numbers deserve the truth. They deserve the full truth and they deserve it now.

🕒 9.32pm

John Mann >

(Bassetlaw) (Lab)

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I have been listening in appropriate awe to the brilliance of the speeches, particularly from the Members from Sheffield, Liverpool and around Merseyside, which is highly appropriate to the subject. They have delivered in terms of the quality of the argument and the eloquence with which they have put it. I trust that those who edit and those who own *The Sun* will be listening in to the debate and will be preparing their front pages in anticipation.

I am one of those who, for the past 25 years and more, has never allowed a copy of *The Sun* into my house. Whether I will again or not I do not know, so perhaps I will not see the apology that is due, but it is due because the evil committed by that newspaper shocked any decent person in this country.

I was asked to speak in this debate by one of my constituents, who pressed me repeatedly. One could hear the trauma in the e-mails that she sent me, repeatedly demanding, first, that I sign in support. I told her that I already had done so and had done in the previous Parliament. Then she said, “I need you to be there. I need you to be representing me at the debate.” I said I would be there. Then she said, “I need you to speak in the debate.” I represent the nearest Nottinghamshire constituency to Hillsborough and have many Sheffield Wednesday and Nottingham Forest supporters and a handful of Liverpool supporters in it. I have no idea which team she went to support that day.

📄 [Column 719](#)

I remember listening on my little radio to what was going on that day and recalling the only time I had stood in the Leppings Lane end for a semi-final, which had been a few years before. When I listened to my hon. Friend the Member for Liverpool, Walton (Steve Rotheram), I remembered going through that tunnel. I cannot remember whether we were in section 3 or 4, but I remember more and more people coming in until we could scarcely move or breathe. Then, all the little kids, including my brother, who was tiny at the time—I was not much bigger—had to be lifted up, passed on hundreds of people's hands and put down to the front because there were no crash barriers then. Probably thousands of people had to be moved on to the side of the pitch that day. That was some years before, so the lessons had not been learned.

I can think of other stadiums, not only in Sheffield, where I have been in similar situations. As a kid I used to be put on a stool; I started on a stool that was bigger than I was and then moved to one that was a bit smaller. I have been in stadiums where I stood on my stool, lost it in the first few minutes and did not get it back until after full time, but I went backwards and forwards and my feet never touched the ground.

I recall going to places like Chelsea in the '80s and seeing the venom directed against ordinary football supporters, particularly visiting supporters, as though they were some sort of scum who should not be there. That was the climate that existed at the time and that was how football fans on all sides would have been seen there. There are many members and supporters of Nottingham Forest in my constituency, and every one of them stands alongside the supporters of Liverpool football club, as do all other supporters across the country. My hon. Friend the

Member for Liverpool, Walton said, “There but for the grace of God go we.” Was it the toss of a coin that decided who went in one end and who went in the other, because it will have been no more scientific than that? Every time I have been to semi-finals at the same ground I have ended up in different ends each time. There is no science to it; it is luck. It is only a matter of luck that it was not Nottingham Forest supporters in the Leppings Lane end that day. That is the point.

Vernon Coaker >

(Gedling) (Lab)

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Will my hon. Friend give way?

John Mann >

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My hon. Friend wants to join me in making this point on behalf of football supporters across Nottinghamshire. It could have been our supporters who were there.

Vernon Coaker >

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Does my hon. Friend agree that it is really important that the people of Sheffield and, above all, the people of Liverpool, the families of the 96, the supporters of Liverpool football club and all decent people across the country know that the people of Nottinghamshire and Nottingham and the fans of Nottingham Forest stand absolutely with them today in their horror at what happened on that awful day and in their support for the motion before the House?

John Mann >

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There is not a supporter of any football club anywhere in the country, and certainly not a supporter of Nottingham Forest, who does not stand shoulder to shoulder with the fans and the people of Liverpool in demanding the truth and demanding justice, because it could easily have been on the toss of a coin that Nottingham Forest supporters were in the Leppings Lane end on that fateful day, and exactly the same thing would have happened. That tragedy was nothing whatever to do with the fans and supporters of Liverpool football club—nothing whatever. They just happened to be the unlucky ones—the ones in the wrong place at the wrong time, when the wrong decisions were made by people in authority. Any of us who went to football matches could have been there.

I have seen a vast amount of football. I have seen Liverpool football club, up at Anfield and elsewhere, and I have never once wanted them to win a game when I have been there, and to be honest I never will, but there is no finer set of football fans—football supporters—in this country or anywhere else in the world. That is the quality of the people of Liverpool, that is the quality of the people who support Liverpool football club, and that is why all the football world, not least the supporters of Nottingham Forest, stands alongside them.

We have had progress. We want to see full justice. These people deserve justice, and it is about time it happened.

 9.40pm

Mr Dave Watts >

(St Helens North) (Lab)

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I did not intend to take part in the debate, but I am very grateful for the opportunity to do so.

I, too, congratulate my hon. Friend the Member for Liverpool, Walton (Steve Rotherham) on, and acknowledge his role in, securing this debate. He has been a Member for only a short period, but he has already proved himself a champion not only of this issue but of the whole city of Liverpool.

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I also thank and am grateful to my right hon. Friend the Member for Leigh (Andy Burnham), who has demonstrated that principles still stand in politics. He was prepared to put his neck on the line to make sure that the 96 received justice, so he should be praised for his actions when he was a member of the previous Government.

I acknowledge the role of my hon. Friend the Member for Garston and Halewood (Maria Eagle), who has been an active campaigner on the issue, and my hon. Friend the Member for Halton (Derek Twigg), who has not been named so far but who played an important role in negotiations between the families and the then Government to set up the original inquiry.

It is important that we do not just pat ourselves on the back, however, and I know that this debate would not have happened without the active campaigning of the families of the 96 or, indeed, the Liverpool fans themselves. Liverpool fans not just in the UK but throughout the world have taken part in the campaign, and the families would also like us to put on record their thanks to the club and to the manager, who have steadfastly supported the campaign from day one. The club has given them great assistance over a long period.

I have a personal interest, which I spoke about earlier in the debate, because unfortunately I lost one of my good pals, GRO-A in the tragedy. We grew up together. We went to pubs, clubs and regularly to the match, but I lost contact with GRO-A for many years, and I did not make contact with him until a couple of weeks before the Hillsborough tragedy. I had not seen him for some years, but he walked up to me, we recognised each other—surprisingly!—and we arranged to meet.

Unfortunately, I never had the opportunity to meet GRO-A have a social drink with him and remember the old days, because the next time I had any contact with him was when his funeral was held, and I know from that funeral the devastating effect of the tragedy on his direct family and his friends, who were all in the church. I remember seeing a packed church and representatives of Liverpool football club, all there paying tribute to a man for whom I had a great deal of admiration, and I was sorry that I did not have a chance to have that last drink with him.

I congratulate my hon. Friend the Member for Wirral South (Alison McGovern). Her speech was both passionate and from the heart, and I am not surprised that the families identified with it. It demonstrates that there are still people in the House who do things with a passion and from the heart, and I congratulate her on an outstanding speech.

This debate has already achieved something. It has proved that there was responsibility for the problems that arose. The mistakes were made by a range of different groups of people—the police, the emergency services, the football authorities, and many others—but no one can identify that it was the fault of football fans or the result of Liverpool fans' actions. If the debate does nothing else, it will give wide media coverage to the fact that this had nothing to do with Liverpool fans.

A number of people are responsible for the view that Liverpool fans were responsible for the disaster, and that issue would be covered by the release of information from the Government. However, we also need all the media outlets to reveal the source of the information that they used in the days after the tragedy. It is crucial that the information is put on the public record so that we know why they wrote such terrible stories about Liverpool fans and about the disaster. Nearly all the media outlets now accept that their stories were irresponsible and untrue, but there is one man who still has not made that apology: Kelvin MacKenzie. Quite frankly, he should make that apology tomorrow, publicly, and if he does not every media outlet in this country should ban him completely and never give him time again.

I congratulate everyone in the House on the debate. I also congratulate the Government. They came under a great deal of pressure from this House and beyond to publish the full details, and I am very pleased that they are now going to do that. The whole House is united about getting all

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the information and all the documents out as quickly as possible so that we can draw a line under this issue.

🕒 9.46pm

Andrew Miller >

(Ellesmere Port and Neston) (Lab)

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I will be very brief because I want to leave time for my hon. Friend the Member for Liverpool, Walton (Steve Rotherham) to wind up, but there are a few things that I would like to put on record. First, the whole House will congratulate my hon. Friend on an amazingly powerful and emotional speech. I do not think there have been many speeches in my 19 years here when there were so many damp eyes in the Chamber, and that is understandable given the circumstances.

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When I moved to the north-west from Portsmouth in 1977, Liverpool supporters told me, “You’ll now learn about football”, and to a certain extent that was very true. However, it was my late neighbour, the late Cliff Lloyd, a one-time secretary of the Professional Footballers Association who was on Liverpool’s books as a schoolboy before the second world war, who told me about the stools that my hon. Friend the Member for Bassetlaw (John Mann) mentioned. That is intriguing. In both the houses I have lived in during that time, a little stool was there, and it was for Dad to take along with him for his lad so that he could see the match. Those stools were used on the terraces in Liverpool by families who went for a family occasion and enjoyed their game.

I want to contrast that—the truth of the sport of football and the passion there is on the terraces—with what was said by the police, by *The Sun*, and by several other commentators. The contrast is so stark that we need to sit back, reflect and ask ourselves what drove the police leadership to get things so wrong—to encourage people to amend their statements. These are very serious issues. I am delighted that the Home Secretary has given such a positive response and that, I hope, we are going to get to the bottom of those issues.

We should contrast that with the way in which newspapers such as *The Sun* got it so wrong. What gave them the right to publish such disgusting filth when people had died? That is no way for responsible media to operate. Whatever happens at the end of Bishop James Jones’s inquiry, we have to reflect on this matter as a House. How can we ensure that the media take a more responsible view when they report on tragedies?

As has been said, we have given Bishop James Jones rather a lot to do given the responsibilities of the inquiries he is chairing. I hope that the Home Secretary will confirm that the Government want him to give this task the highest priority among the inquiries he is conducting into forestry and other issues. This matter is of such importance that we should encourage him to give it the highest possible priority.

I want to put on record my thanks to my right hon. Friend the Member for Leigh (Andy Burnham), who has been unstinting in raising this issue before public audiences. He spoke in my constituency a couple of months ago. In very emotional terms, he described what he saw as the roles of Parliament and Government in addressing this terrible tragedy and injustice. I hope that his role will not be forgotten, nor that of my hon. Friend the Member for Garston and Halewood (Maria Eagle). The two of them have been extraordinary.

I also want to comment on my hon. Friend the Member for Halton (Derek Twigg) who, as has been said, was at the tragic game. He is always an unassuming individual. He has taught me a lot about the events of the day. I congratulate him on being persistent in pressing this case.

We face a set of circumstances that require total openness. Today we have discussed the issues of data protection and redaction. The Home Secretary has been very positive. Many Members will know that I was quite heavily involved in bringing the Data Protection Act 1998 together from the Data Protection Act 1984 and the European directive. Unless, as the Home Secretary said, family members have specific reasons to request that the bishop does not publish certain things,

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there is no reason under the 1998 Act why anything other than minor details, such as signatures, should be withheld from the public gaze. We need to ensure that if anything is done beyond those reasons, it is annotated to record why it has been done. I would ask the bishop to think about how he could do that, so that anyone who has the slightest suspicion about any redaction can be comfortable about why it has occurred.

The list read out by my hon. Friend the Member for Liverpool, Walton was powerful and emotional. On that point, I think it is appropriate for the House to give the last few minutes to him, because he has done the House a tremendous service by raising this case today.

Hon. Members

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Hear! Hear!

 9.54pm

Steve Rotheram >

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I thank all colleagues who have taken part in tonight's debate. I said at the start of my speech, three and a bit hours ago, that the issue of Hillsborough would not go away, and Members can see for themselves what it means to the families who have joined us in the House tonight. Members from across the country have most eloquently articulated their constituents' thoughts on the disaster.


Today has been the most emotional and most rewarding day of my short parliamentary career. You, Mr Speaker, said on the day you were elected Speaker of this great House that you believed Members were, by and large, "upright, decent, honourable people", looking to improve the lives and change the lot of their fellow citizens in this country. Tonight, I hope I speak on behalf of all the family members present, and the millions of people across Merseyside and much further afield who support them, when I say that Members in all parts of the House—those who signed the petition, those who will support the motion and those who have spoken in the debate—have made a difference to those families' lives. For that, I will be for ever grateful.

I am grateful also to my right hon. Friend the Member for Leigh (Andy Burnham), an Evertonian who has pursued the cause of justice over the past few years with the tenacity that only he could have brought to the job.

I spoke earlier of the eternal flame of solidarity among the people of Liverpool, but tonight I was moved by the contributions of my hon. Friends the Members for Sheffield South East (Mr Betts) and for Penistone and Stocksbridge (Angela Smith). It is clear that they are Sheffield through and through, and that, like ours, their city continues to live under the dark cloud of the events of April 1989.

I am grateful to Members who have contributed. I have already received texts from many people, including Jamie Carragher and Kenny Dalglish, praising the House. I was also pleased to see Joey Barton, who did so much to promote the e-petition, join us in the Public Gallery tonight, as well as Andy Gray and Richard Keys of talkSPORT, who have promoted the issues that we have raised in the House tonight on their radio show in the build-up to the debate. I would also like to thank successive managers of Liverpool and Everton football clubs, who have so effectively used their profiles over the years to support and promote the cause, especially David Moyes, who attended the 20th anniversary service. The players who played on that fateful day also felt the effect of the tragedy, none more so than John Aldridge, who has been unstinting in his support for the families.

I want to give special thanks, of course, to the families and to all the Merseyside MPs—my hon. Friend the Member for Garston and Halewood (Maria Eagle), the hon. Member for Wirral West (Esther McVey), my hon. Friend the Member for Sefton Central (Bill Esterson), my right hon. Friend the Member for Birkenhead (Mr Field), my hon. Friends the Members for Halton (Derek

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Twigg), for Liverpool, Wavertree (Luciana Berger), for Liverpool, Riverside (Mrs Ellman), and for Liverpool, West Derby (Stephen Twigg), my right hon. Friend the Member for Knowsley (Mr Howarth), my hon. Friend the Member for West Lancashire (Rosie Cooper), the hon. Member for Southport (John Pugh) and my hon. Friend the Member for Wirral South (Alison McGovern), whose contribution was brilliantly moving. They know more than most the depth of feeling in our region about the fateful day, and they will be grateful for the giant strides that the fight for justice has taken tonight. I thank the Chair of the Backbench Business Committee, my hon. Friend the Member for North East Derbyshire (Natascha Engel), for her indulgence and advice throughout the process.

Some 100 MPs signed the petition that triggered tonight's debate. Successive Governments made terrible mistakes. Tonight, this Parliament, when given the chance, got it right. When I began the fight for this debate, the families told me that all they had ever wanted was the truth. Tonight we moved a step closer to fulfilling their wish, and I hope that 96 souls will be resting a little easier.

Question put and agreed to.

Resolved,

That this House calls for the full disclosure of all government-related documents, including Cabinet minutes, relating to the 1989 Hillsborough disaster; requires that such documentation be uncensored and without redaction; and further calls for the families of the 96 and the Hillsborough Independent Panel to have unrestricted access to that information.

Andrew Bingham >

(High Peak) (Con)

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On a point of order, Mr Speaker. We have heard a lot tonight about the conduct of News International in 1989. In the light of its recent conduct and its coming in front of a Select Committee, would it be in order for that Select Committee to ask News International to come before it to answer questions about its activities back in 1989?

Mr Speaker >

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I am grateful to the hon. Gentleman for his point of order. The short answer is that Select Committees are at liberty to ask witnesses to appear before them in relation to inquiries upon which they have decided. I hope that that answer is instructive to him and to the House. They can do as they wish, and people are morally obliged and expected to co-operate with parliamentary Committees that are going about public business as they see fit.