

Striking miner scavenges through a pit waste tip at Kirby, South Yorkshire,
for coal to keep his home warm during Britain's 1984 coal strike.

The MINERS' STRIKE 1984/5

A PHOTO-ESSAY
BY JOHN HARRIS

ColdType

**"We face not
an employer, but
a government
aided and abetted
by the judiciary,
the police
and you people
in the media"**

– ARTHUR SCARGILL



THE IMMOVABLE

OBJECT: Arthur Scargill, the Marxist leader of the National Union of

Mineworkers, Britain's strongest union.

THE IRRESTIBLE FORCE:

Margaret Thatcher, Tory prime minister – the Iron Lady.

THE YEAR: 1984, ten years after a previous miners' strike had paralysed the country and brought down Britain's Conservative government; and two years since Thatcher's 'famous' victory over Argentina in her south Atlantic war over the Falkland islands, a conflict described by the Argentinian writer Jorge Luis Borges, as 'like two bald men fighting over a comb.'

THE FLASHPOINT: Thatcher had introduced new anti-union laws to limit labour power, while initiating confrontations with the civil service, health workers, railwaymen and other smaller unions. Emboldened by the lack

THE STRIKERS

A mass picket of strikers attempts to stop coal and oil being delivered by road to Didcot Power Station in Oxfordshire, after railway workers refused to handle new coal stocks.



of action by the rest of the labour movement, she decided to confront the party's biggest enemy, the National Union of Mineworkers, by announcing a provocative restructuring of the industry, after first secretly stockpiling stocks of coal and ensuring docks could handle large-scale imports to keep power stations operating.

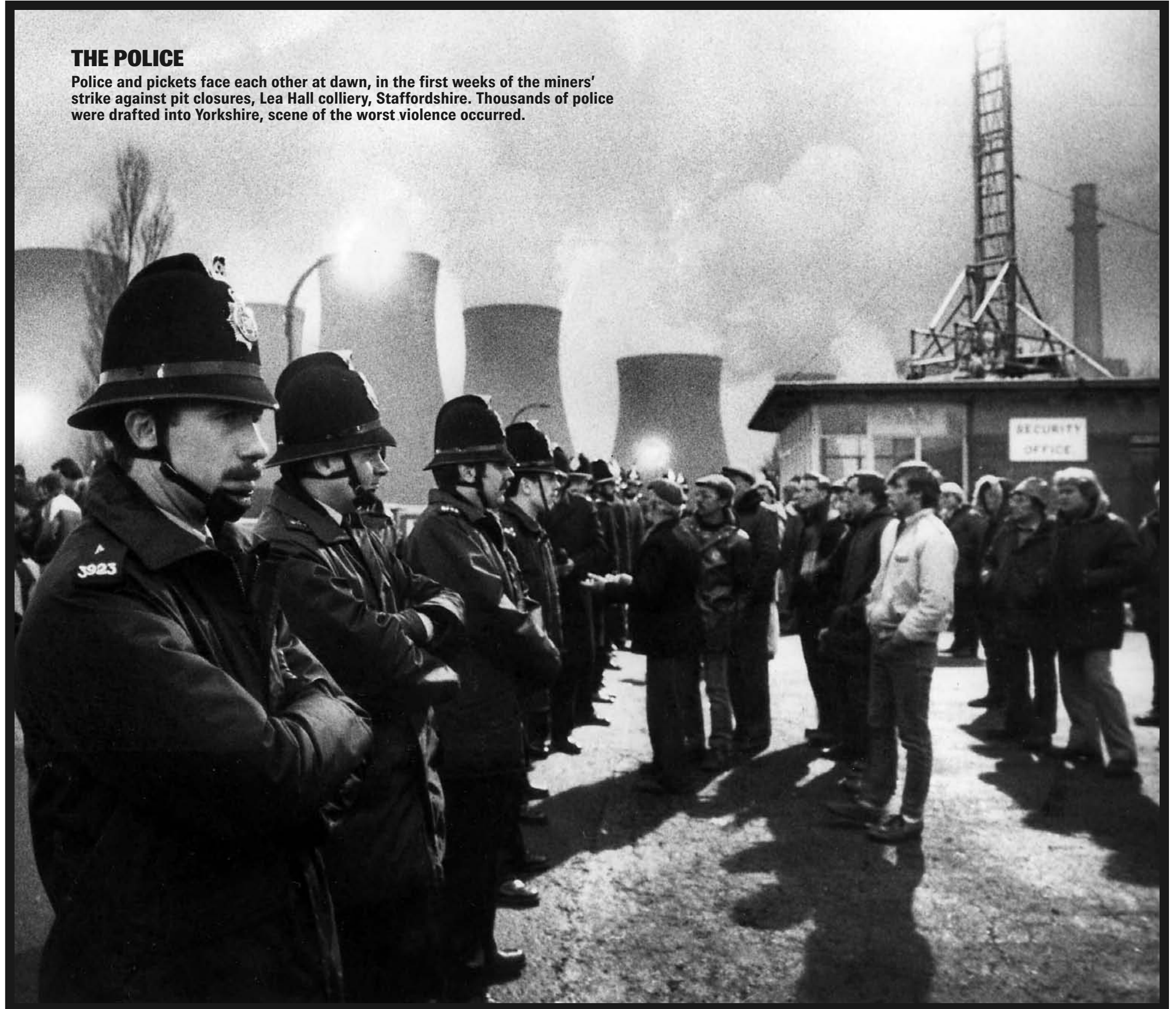
THE HOLD-OUTS: When the first of 20 proposed mine closures, at Cortonwood, Yorkshire, was announced at the beginning of March, Arthur Scargill called a strike and pickets soon brought the huge Yorkshire coalfields to a standstill, followed by those in Kent, Scotland and South Wales, although the majority of Nottinghamshire miners, whose jobs were not threatened, refused to join the strike.

THE BATTLE: When the strike, which the government expected to be over in weeks, closed down the major coalfields, Thatcher ordered thousands of riot police into the mining areas, leading to two bloody confrontations in May and June at Orgreave coke depot, just a few miles from Scargill's union head office. There, in sweltering weather, the police attacked in almost military formation, sending baton-swinging cops on horseback to rout lightly-dressed strikers.

THE MEDIA: The battle of Orgreave highlighted the bias of the media when the BBC re-edited film of the May battle between miners and police to give viewers the impression that the pickets had launched an

THE POLICE

Police and pickets face each other at dawn, in the first weeks of the miners' strike against pit closures, Lea Hall colliery, Staffordshire. Thousands of police were drafted into Yorkshire, scene of the worst violence occurred.



attack on the police when it was the police who had initiated the violence. (Just a few weeks earlier, print workers at Murdoch's tabloid Sun prevented publication of a front page dominated by a photo of Scargill with one arm raised in what the paper claimed was a neo-Nazi salute. The headline was "Mine Fuhrer".)

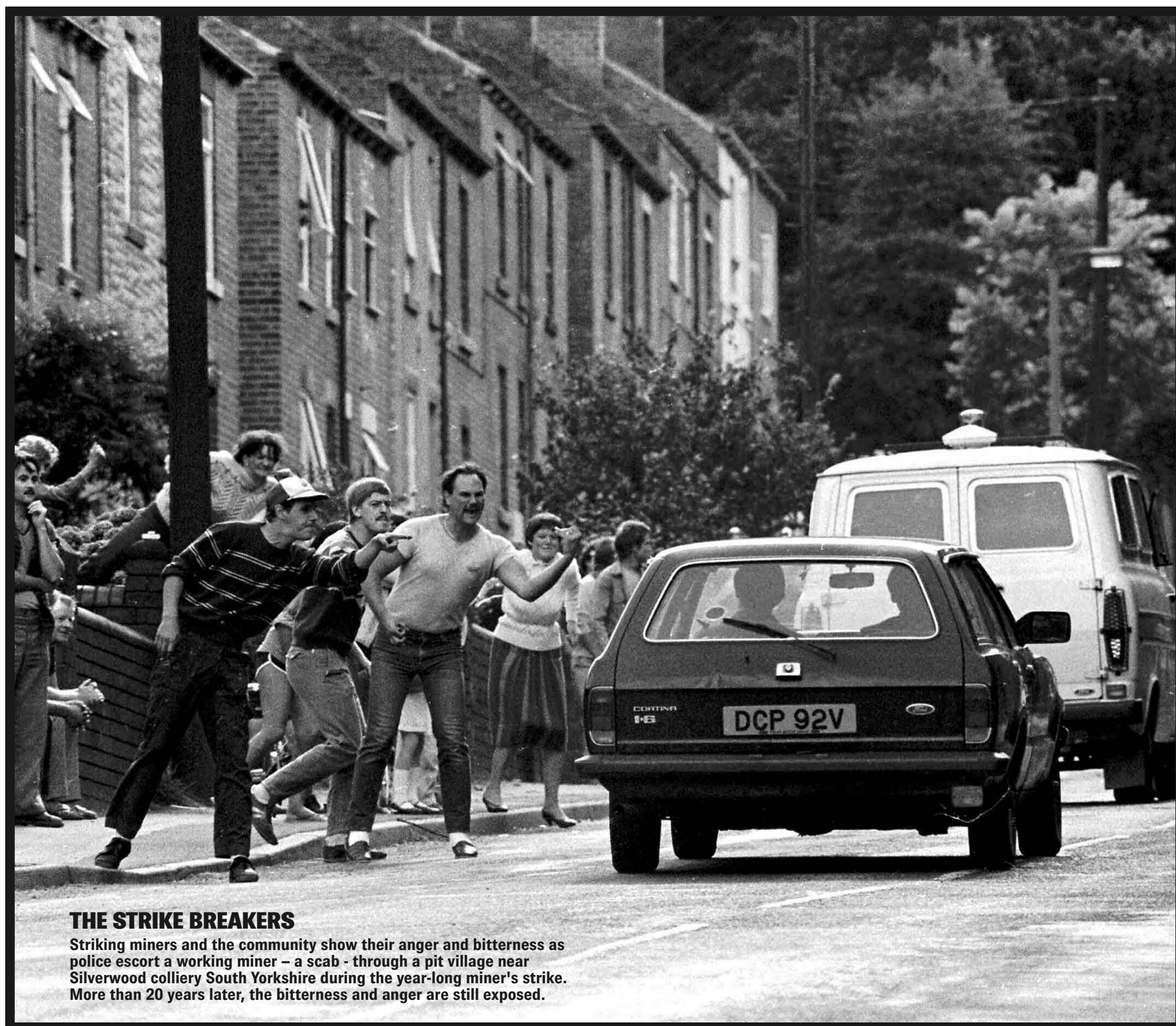
THE RETRIBUTION: The financial hardship of miners and their families was compounded by the withdrawal of benefits by the government – an action that was exacerbated by court seizure of the union's assets – families relying on food parcels and soup kitchens, organised by women's support groups and paid for by donations from workers throughout the country.

THE END: After a hard, cold, Christmas, the trickle of men heading back to work turned into a flood and the strike was finally called off on March 3, 1985, just before its first anniversary.

THE LEGACY: The strike was lost, Scargill defeated. But the greatest losers were not just the miners, but the whole labour movement which soon found itself trampled by the global restructuring of business by Thatcher and her successors on both sides of the Atlantic.

Workers in Britain and the world would soon awake to the reality of the new Thatcher – and Reagan – industrial revolution: a huge rise in 'compensation' for a few executives, and gutted workplaces, leading to low-paying McJobs for the rest.

Audsley Edwards



THE STRIKE BREAKERS

Striking miners and the community show their anger and bitterness as police escort a working miner – a scab – through a pit village near Silverwood colliery South Yorkshire during the year-long miner's strike. More than 20 years later, the bitterness and anger are still exposed.

"We had to fight the enemy without in the Falklands. We always have to be aware of the enemy within, which is much more difficult to fight and more dangerous to liberty" – MARGARET THATCHER



Police charge picketing miners at Orgreave coke works.



Police surround picketing miners at Orgreave as a convoy of coke lorries leaves the plant for Scunthorpe steelworks.



"We've got to step up the tempo of the dispute. I want to see every single miner on the picket line. If that means you get arrested, you'll have to accept the consequences. We're in this to the finish"

– ARTHUR SCARGILL



LEFT: Police arrest miners' leader Arthur Scargill NUM leader at Orgreave

ABOVE: Police hold back a striking miner as a working miner hurls abuse at Mansfield Colliery in Nottinghamshire



Striking miners pull a line of riot police with long shields to the ground during a mass picket at Kellingley colliery in North Yorkshire.



ABOVE: Police in riot gear and winged riot van confront striking miners at Orgreave.

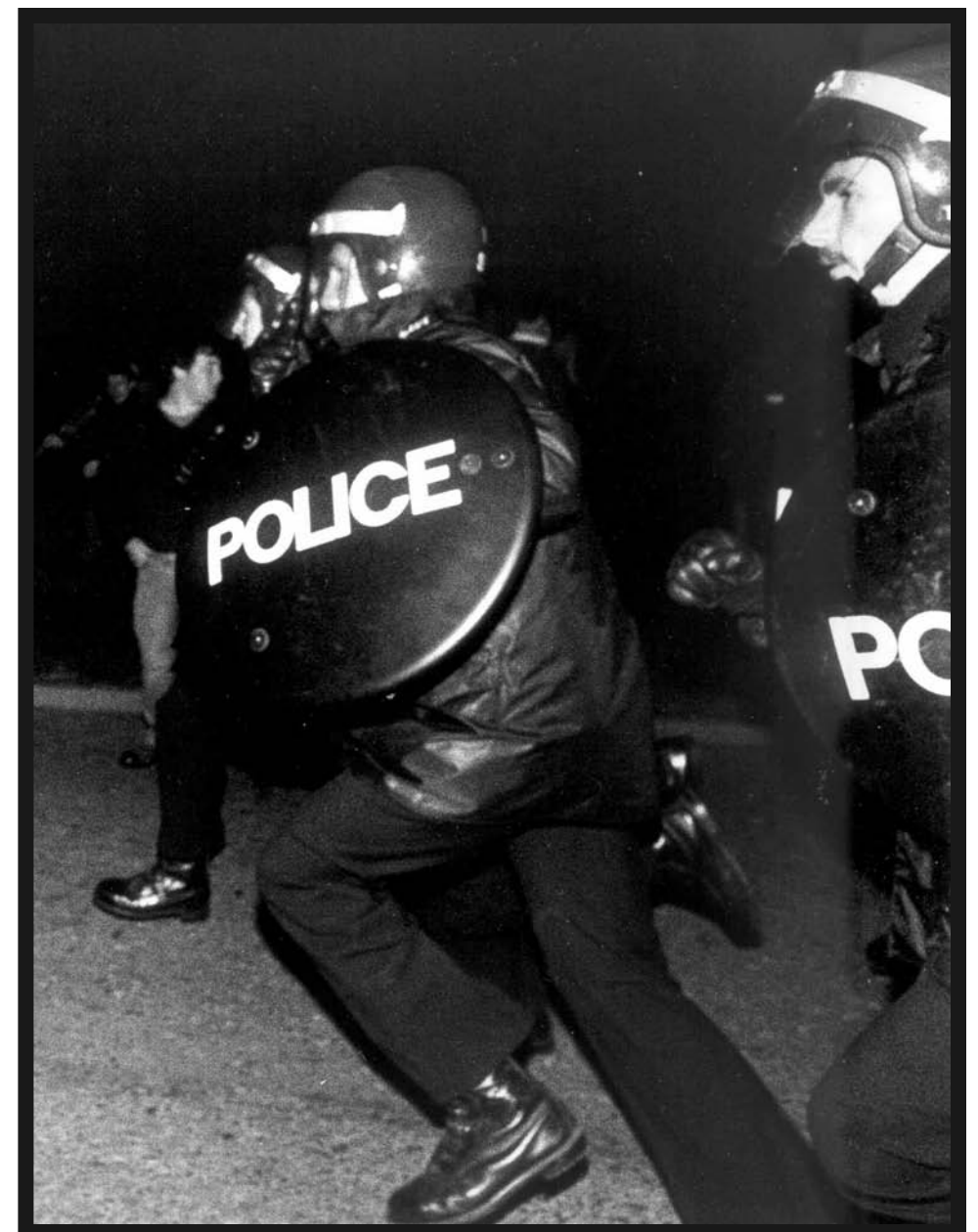
RIGHT: Police use riot gear for the first time in an industrial dispute as a convoy of coke lorries leaves Orgreave for Scunthorpe steelworks. Steel workers who walked out in solidarity with the miners look on.

FAR RIGHT: Mass picket of striking miners are confronted by police in riot gear at Thurcroft pit in South Yorkshire.



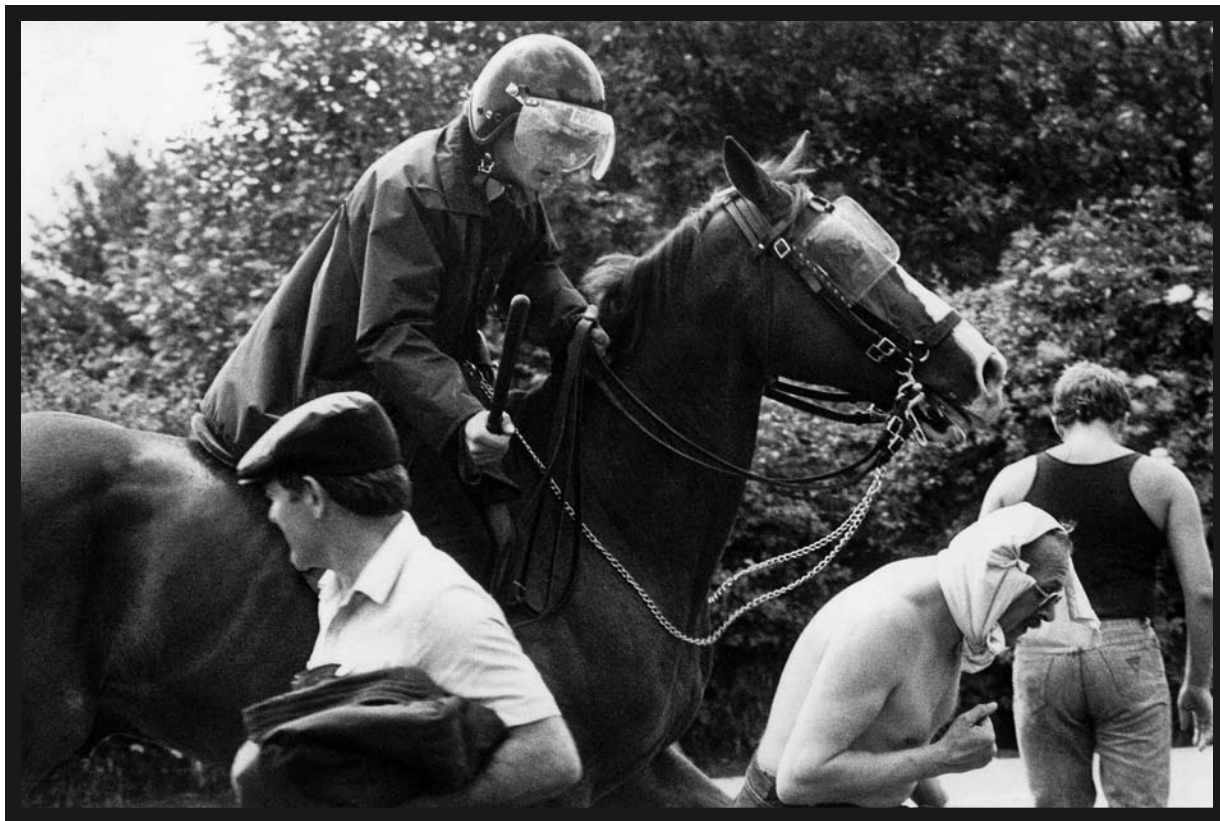
"The British police do not have sophisticated riot equipment to handle demonstrations. The traditional approach is to deploy large numbers of officers in ordinary uniforms in the passive containment of a crowd"

– GOVERNMENT GREEN PAPER





Police open their wall of riot shields to allow mounted police in riot gear to charge a mass picket of striking miners at Orgreave. Media reports claiming the violence was started by strikers were later discredited.



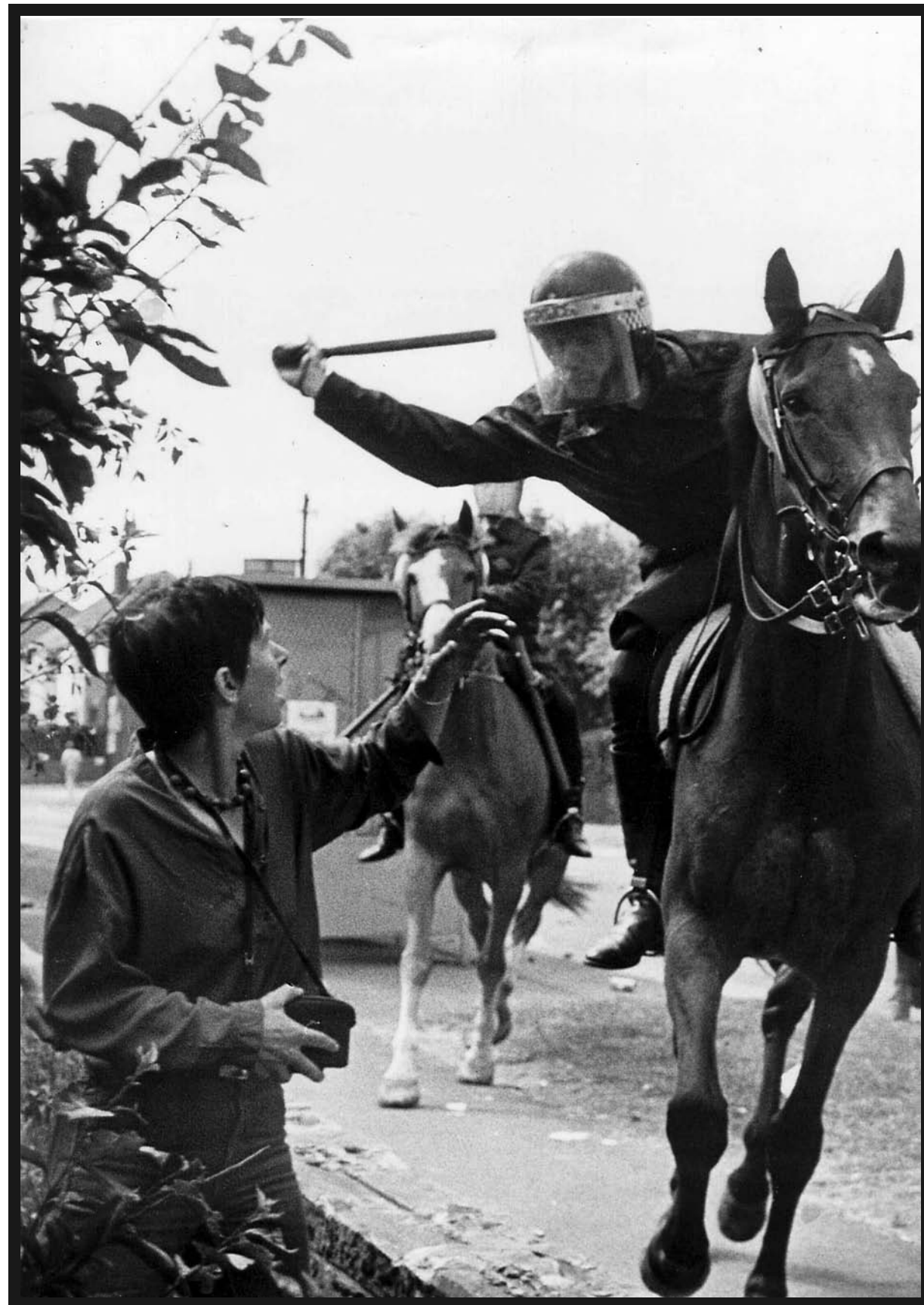
"We have to make it clear that violence is totally unacceptable in our society"

– MARGARET THATCHER

TOP: Mounted policeman in riot gear with truncheon at the ready as police lash out at an Orgreave striker.

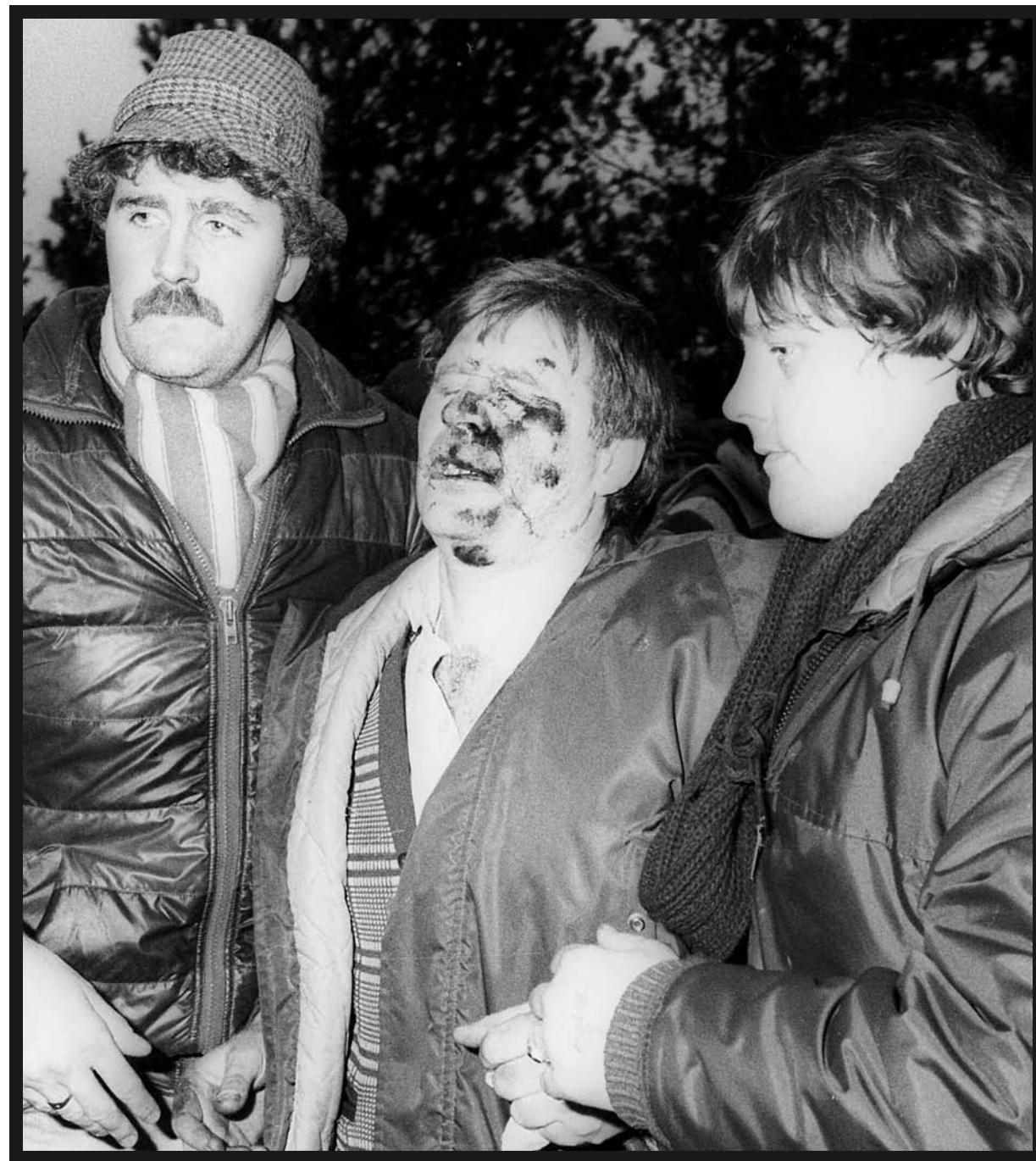
RIGHT: A miner guarding his car feels the fury of a police attack at Orgreave. The attempt to prosecute the miner for rioting later collapsed.

FAR RIGHT: Photographer Lesley Boulton is attacked by a truncheon-wielding policeman at Orgreave. The picture was published by only one of 17 national newspapers in Britain.





"The intimidation and the brutality that has been displayed are something reminiscent of a Latin American state" – ARTHUR SCARGILL



ABOVE: Pickets help a picket hit in the face by a police truncheon at Thoresby Colliery, Nottinghamshire

LEFT: Press photographer helps a picketing miner injured by mounted police at Orgreave.



Ambulance paramedics carry away Darrel Price, a miner injured by a police horsebox driving on the pavement during a mass picket at Rossington Colliery. "The horse box accelerated and swerved towards the picklets", a witness said, adding that the police refused to call an ambulance to attend to the injured man.

**"Ours is a supremely noble aim:
to defend pits, jobs, communities
and the right to work. The sacrifices
and the hardships have forged a unique
commitment among our members"**

– ARTHUR SCARGILL



ABOVE: Emergency services rescue a miner buried while riddling for coal amongst the pit waste for fuel at Silverwood colliery

RIGHT: Miners collect coal from waste slag heap at a pit to help their families keep warm during the bitter winter.





Striking miners at Kersley Colliery Coventry eat in a soup kitchen funded by the donations of fellow union members.



THE END: Miners' support group leads a demonstration of strikers at Rossington pit village before the return to work after the miners had decided to end their year-long strike.

**John Harris spent almost a year photographing
the miners' strike**
He is now head of the British picture agency, ReportDigital

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