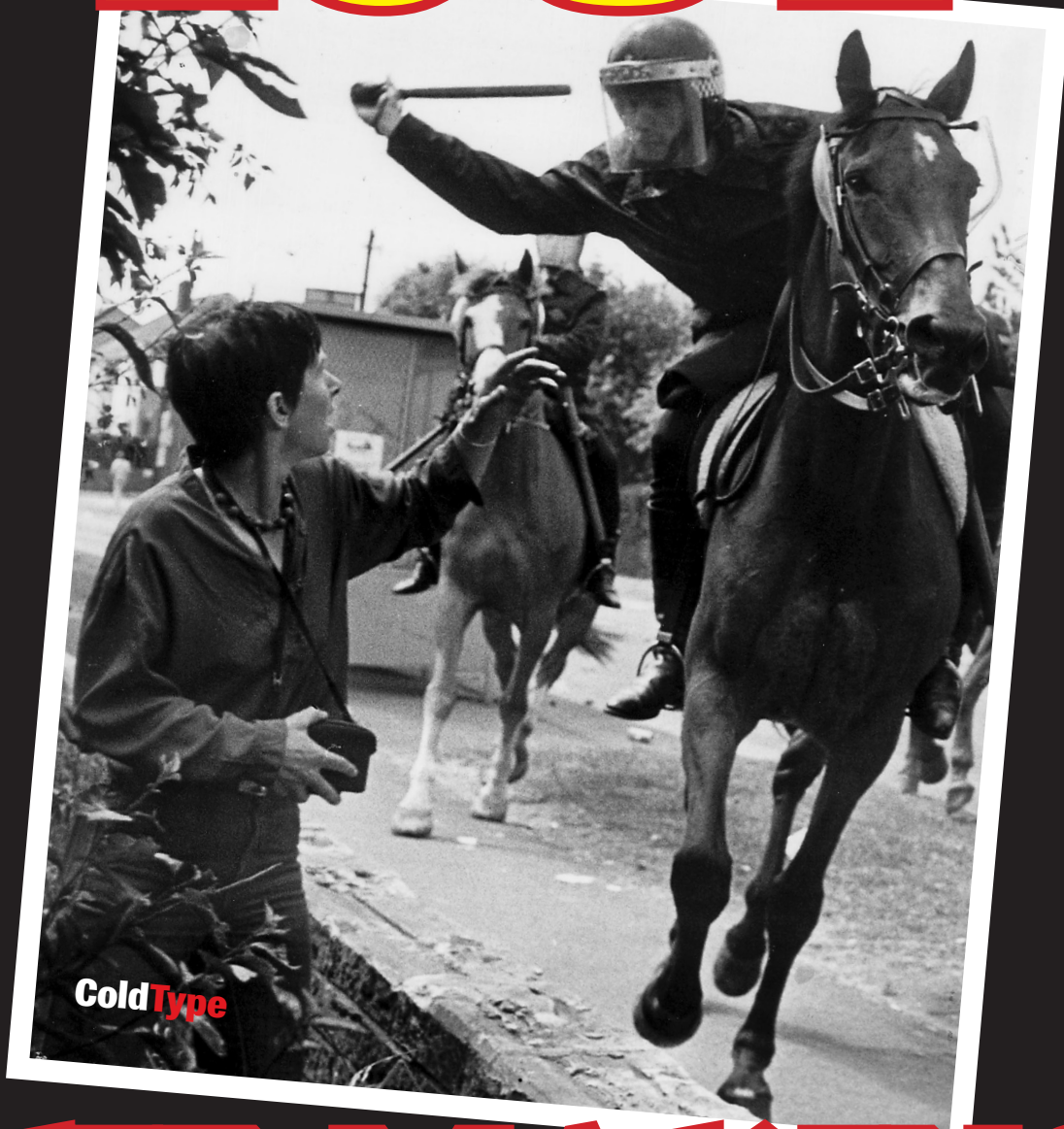


1984



THE MAKING OF AN ICON

AND HOW THE BRITISH PRESS
TRIED TO DESTROY IT

An excerpt from **SHAFTED: The Media, the Miners' Strike & the Aftermath**



SHAFTED: The Media, the Miners' Strike and the Aftermath, published by the Campaign for Press & Broadcasting Freedom – £9.99. (£12.50 inc P&P), revisits the way the media covered the 1984-5 strike, and also deals with subsequent events, including the devastating impact of the pit closure programme, initiated in 1992, on mining communities.

Shafted draws together a range of contributors who analyse media coverage during the strike. The book also looks at alternative media, photography, film and documentary programmes. The current controversy around 'clean coal' and the environment is also examined.

Contributors include: **Nicholas Jones** on his experience covering the year-long strike for BBC radio; **Pete Lazenby** on reporting at the heart of the strike in Yorkshire for the Yorkshire Evening Post; **Paul Routledge**, industrial correspondent on The Times during the strike, on trade unions and the media; **Tony Harcup** on Alternative Media in the strike; **Julian Petley and Michael Bailey** on the story behind a defining photo from the miners' strike taken by John Harris at Orgreave; while **Janina Struk** draws together a range of photos which captured the spirit of the strike

Buy the book at: <http://www.cpbef.org.uk> – £9.99. (£12.50 inc P&P)

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THE MINERS' STRIKE — 25 YEARS ON

By GRANVILLE WILLIAMS

Editor of **SHAFTED: The Media,
the Miners' Strike & the Aftermath**

The epic, year-long miners' strike of 1984-85 was the most bitterly contested industrial dispute in twentieth-century British labour history. For the Thatcher government the defeat of the miners meant that a political agenda of privatisation, deregulation and attacks on the trade union movement could move ahead virtually unimpeded.

The new political era was summed up well by Joe Owens, a former miner, in his Introduction to *Miners 1984-1994*: 'These times would come to be characterised by the "management's right to manage"; telephone digit salaries for the chairmen of privatised natural resources and the abolition of wages councils; the return of mass unemployment and the emergence of Guinness as a cure for dementia; the marketing of UK plc as the home of low wages and the strictest anti-trade union legislation outside Turkey...'

The sheer scale of the struggle led to a flow of books, documentaries and plays dealing with the strike, and local news-



Thatcherism ushered in the age of excess, and New Labour continued to support the same policies of flexible labour markets and the deregulation of financial services

papers in mining communities produced special supplements recording the occasion. This happened on both the tenth and twentieth anniversaries of the strike, but I sense a great deal more media interest in the twenty-fifth anniversary of the strike, or the 'silver jubilee' as some old stalwarts call it.

It is easy to see why. Thatcherism ushered in the age of excess, and New Labour continued to support the same policies of flexible labour markets and the deregulation of financial services. It was Peter Mandelson, now the UK government's Trade Secretary, who assured us he was 'intensely relaxed about people getting filthy rich'.

We witnessed the neglect of industry, so that with the exception of a few tiny pockets, the UK economy, as the political economist F. William Engdahl points out, is 'a hollowed out wreck. It's really a service economy now'.

Now the consequences of those policies are for all to see. We have the worst financial crisis since the Great Depres-

* This BBC piece explains the reference in the Joe Owens quote to 'Guinness as a cure for dementia':
<http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/business/1723266.stm>

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sion, caused by the rush for easy profits of commercial and investment banks, hedge funds, insurance companies, private equity firms and other financial institutions. Governments give massive bailouts for banks, whilst recession and mass unemployment loom ever larger.

What a contrast with the way the miners were treated. The Thatcher and Major governments rigged the energy market through the dash for gas and nuclear energy and spent billions of pounds destroying the mining industry in an act of political revenge. The consequences for mining communities, in terms of long-term unemployment, ill-health, poverty and crime, have been devastating. But to cap it all we are now near the end of North Sea oil and gas and face the prospect of insecure energy supplies.

On the twenty-fifth anniversary we can re-assess what the strike was about. I think Geoffrey Goodman, then the industrial editor of the widely-read tabloid *The Daily Mirror*, captured it best in *The Miners' Strike* (1985). He pointed out the dispute was 'unique in terms of conventional industrial conflict. It was not about the pay packet; it was not about working conditions, hours of work, or even in the normal sense, a traditional conflict with management...the future of work was at the core of it. To remove a pit from a mining community is to snap the lifeline to a job'. It was certainly not about the absurdity that one man, the President of the National Union of Mineworkers, Arthur Scargill, kept, against their will and in spite of all efforts by the National Coal Board and the government, 100,000 miners and their families out on strike for the best part of a year.

Shafted: The Media, the Miners' Strike and the Aftermath captures a number of different aspects of the strike and the



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consequences of defeat. Huw Beynon, for example, explores what happened to the South Wales and Durham coalfields after the strike. But the main focus of the book is on the media and the miners. Tony Harcup, who worked at the time on an alternative magazine, *Leeds Other Paper*, writes about alternative media in the miners' strike. Nicholas Jones reported the year-long strike for BBC Radio as an industrial correspondent. Peter Lazenby, Industrial Correspondent for the *Yorkshire Evening Post*, a paper at the heart of the Yorkshire coalfield, and Paul Routledge, then Labour Editor of *The Times* reflect on their experiences reporting the strike.

Michael Bailey and Julian Petley analyse an iconic photo, taken at Orgreave, the setting for a savage assault on the miners by riot police, of a mounted policeman wielding his baton above a woman's head. They interview both the photographer (John Harris) and the woman (Leslie Boulton) and produce a fascinating account of the subsequent use and abuse of the photo. This chapter is reprinted on the following pages.

There is also a thirty-two page insert of photos, cartoons and other images from the strike.

From my point of view it has been a fascinating experience putting the book together, meeting new people, re-reading the literature on the strike, and tracking down the very powerful North Selby NUM banner which is on the cover of the book. We plan to have it on display at the West Yorkshire Playhouse in Leeds when we have the book launch and public meeting on 12 March 2009.

We also have a website at <http://www.cpbf.org.uk/shafted> where people can order the book and view other material on the miners' strike

THE MAKING OF AN ICON

AND HOW THE BRITISH PRESS TRIED TO DESTROY IT

By Michael Bailey and Julian Petley

(An excerpt from **SHAFTED: The Media,
the Miners' Strike & the Aftermath**)

Orgreave in Yorkshire became a focal point of the strike because of British Steel's use of lorry convoys to transport coking coal from there to its Scunthorpe steel works.

Orgreave was an attempt by the government, through the deployment of highly trained riot police, to prove to the miners and trade unionists at large that picketing could not succeed. For the miners it was a chance to turn the tide of the strike. To hit an economic target and provide a focus around which trade unionists could mobilise in support ... The last great battle at Orgreave was on 18 June 1984 when 5000 pickets in teeshirts and trainers were confronted by a similar number of policemen with riot shields backed by dogs and horses. The government knew they had won a round. Negotiations with the NUM were suddenly broken off. Thatcher had tasted blood. *The Economist* noted "the government wants to be seen to have broken the legendary power of the miners". (*Blood, Sweat and Tears*, Artworker Books, 1985).

Lesley Boulton was at Orgreave that day, supporting the striking miners.

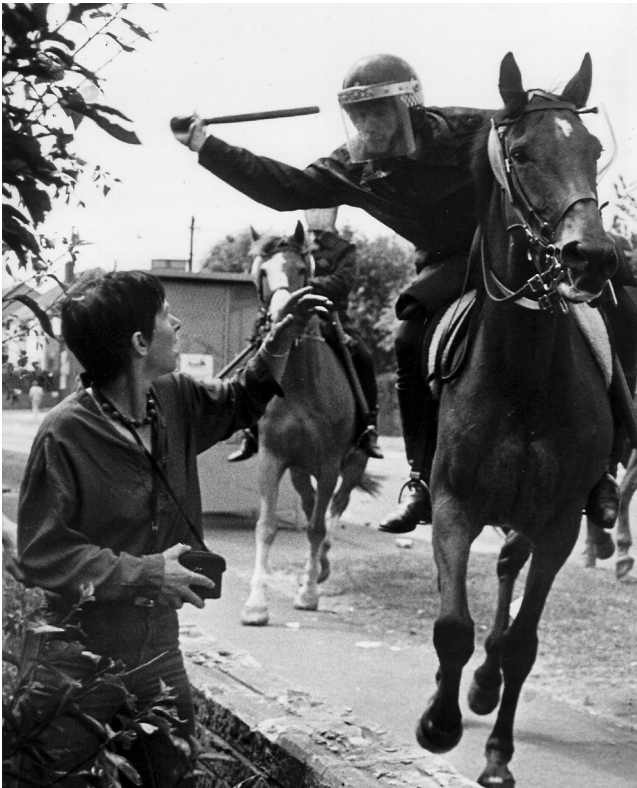


The miners clearly weren't planning a battle – men don't go into battle with their shirts tucked into their back pockets!

The police, on the other hand, were stood in massed ranks, many dressed in full riot gear

Lesley Boulton: A friend and I drove to Orgreave and we parked in the Asda car park. We got there about 10am and it was a gloriously sunny day ... miners and sympathisers were getting drinks and food from the supermarket, playing football in the car park and slowly making their way down to a field over the bridge. By the time we got down to the field it was quite busy with smatterings of miners dotted here and there, just sitting around talking and having a laugh. Many had their shirts off and were making the most of the good weather. So, the miners and supporters like myself were, on the whole, very relaxed and there was no sense of what was to come; nobody expected that the day would turn into this horrific, violent confrontation. The miners clearly weren't planning a battle – men don't go into battle with their shirts tucked into their back pockets! The police, on the other hand, were stood in massed ranks, many dressed in full riot gear. It was very odd, almost like they were actually wanting something to happen. They weren't prepared simply for the possibility of violence. Of course, we now know that the police had

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JOHN HARRIS: “The officer in the picture shouted: ‘I’ll have you as well, you bitch’ and he came cantering down and took a swing at her”

been instructed by their political masters that this was the day to show the miners what was what and who was who. It was showdown time and the police were spoiling for a fight. It was time to show the hoi polloi who was in control, even if it meant the police had to kick the shit out of them.

When it eventually kicked off, the police charged up the field, the miners retreated into the village, and both the miners and police set up barricades. A small group of miners started throwing stones and the police charged them, at which point I dived behind a wall and I came out only when they’d gone. I then started walking down to the bus stop; just before it was a short wall and behind the wall was an injured miner who looked to have cracked ribs and was clearly in a lot of pain. I was really concerned and



A mounted policeman came out of nowhere, swinging his truncheon at me. I only just managed to get out of the way thanks to a miner who pulled me to one side

I asked a policeman who was stood in the street to get an ambulance, at which point a mounted policeman came out of nowhere, swinging his truncheon at me. I only just managed to get out of the way thanks to a miner who pulled me to one side. And that’s exactly what John Harris captured on film. The police were clearly enjoying themselves ... they were excited, out of control ... it felt a bit like Peterloo but without the swords.

John Harris was a young photographer covering the strike for the International Freelance Library (IFL).

John Harris: During the previous mass pickets at Orgreave, the police had corralled all the photographers so that they couldn’t see what was going on. So on the day on which I took the photograph

of Lesley we'd decided to take the risk of going in with the miners. The previous week I'd been told off by my boss at IFL, Simon Guttman, for not getting the police on horseback properly (which wasn't at all easy), so I was under some pressure. After fleeing the Nazis, Simon had worked on *Picture Post*, so he belonged to that tradition which saw the photographer's moral responsibility as being to show what was wrong with the world, so that people of good will would do something about it. Anyway, when I got there nothing was going on, so we went off to breakfast – only to find when we came back that all hell had broken loose. The police had been making repeated charges up the road, but as always it was a very unequal conflict. Anyway, I picked up the end of it. Previously the police would have tried to stop you taking pictures, but this time they seemed to have taken the decision that they were going to trash the miners in full view of the cameras. I got knocked over into someone's front garden, and a woman started calling for an ambulance for an injured picket. The police charge that had passed us had begun to come back, and there was a police horse right next to me; what you can't actually see in the famous picture, which is a vertical crop of an image taken with a wide-angle lens, is that there's the boot of a mounted police officer right next to me. Anyway, the officer in the picture shouted: 'I'll have you as well, you bitch' and he came cantering down and took a swing at her; if you look closely at the picture you'll see a miner has grabbed her belt and pulled her back so that he just missed her.

The picture of Lesley being attacked was published on the front page of Labour Weekly, 22 June 1984. Under the headline



The police were completely out of control. They had pushed the pickets right into the village and were just lashing out and hitting anyone who was not wearing a uniform

'She was only trying to help ...' it ran the following story:

Her crime? She was trying to help a picket with crushed ribs outside Orgreave coking works. "I was trying to keep out of the way and was stood on the pavement. I was shouting for someone to call an ambulance for the pickets who had been badly injured. Suddenly this horse came galloping at me and the policeman hurled abuse at me and took a swipe at my head. It was terrifying", said Boulton, a member of Sheffield Women Against Pit Closures. "The police were completely out of control. They had pushed the pickets right into the village and were just lashing out and hitting anyone who was not wearing a uniform. John Harris, the photographer who captured this picture, ended up in a bush after he dived away from the mounted police officer, who also took a swing at him. Boulton added: "It was clear to me from early on in the morning that the police tactics used caused the violence. The pickets had not gone to Orgreave wanting that sort of battle".

This picture was used very widely in the Left press in Britain and abroad, and also in mainstream overseas publications like the German news magazine Stern. It played an extremely important role in both the national and international campaign in support of the striking miners, and indeed rapidly became a modern icon, immediately summing up in one intensely dramatic image the brutality of the state's onslaught on the striking miners and on all those who dared to support them.

'Iconic photographs assume special significance in respect to the past. Iconic images rise above many other images and the vast background of print jour-

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nalism to shape understanding of specific events and periods, both at the time of their original publication and subsequently ... [They] are widely recognized and remembered, are understood to be representations of historically significant events, activate strong emotional identification or response, and are reproduced across a range of media, genres, or topics'. (*No Caption Needed: Iconic Photographs, Public Culture, and Liberal Democracy*, Robert Hariman and John Louis Lucaites, University of Chicago Press, 2007).

Lesley Boulton: I do think the photograph is iconic in the sense that it's about power and the extremes to which the state, and the functionaries of the state, will go to in order to enforce their will on the public. Looking at the image you can see that the state wasn't going to tolerate this sort of dissent. If they had to knock people's heads off they would do so and they didn't care. I personally was shocked by the violence of the police; even though I'd experienced it at Greenham Common, it was much greater during the strike. So yes, it says a lot about what the state will do to shut people up and how the state didn't care about what happened to the miners and to the communities in which they lived. And that's still true to this day.

John Harris: I think the reason why it's become iconic is that it was politically a soft picture, and that quality is intensified by the *Labour Weekly* headline 'She was only trying to help ...' She wasn't someone who'd been daring to throw bricks at the police and actively resisting. It's a bit like a First World War propaganda picture with the nasty Hun attacking a nun. There was a contemporaneous image which I took, and which was used as



JOHN HARRIS: "I was surprised there weren't hundreds of pictures like this all over the place."



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a double-page spread by *Stern*, of a miner being thrashed over the bonnet of his car by a riot copper, which was a much harder image. I was surprised that there weren't hundreds of pictures like this all over the place, as this kind of thing was happening all around me.

In terms of images of violence, even the Left press was reluctant to print pictures of the miners fighting back, and I had a certain inbuilt bias against taking them, quite honestly. Firstly, on the practical level, you might have got your

head kicked in by miners around you, who might have thought you worked for the Right-wing press. But secondly, we didn't think that these were the kinds of images which would get used by the media which supported the miners. So there was a bit of self-censorship going on at times, to be honest. But having said that, what never ceased to amaze me was the extent to which these huge burly miners *didn't* react; they put up with all sorts of provocation, often at great length and in good humour, before they finally reacted – if at all.

A picture like this was acceptable to the people in the Labour Party who were decrying violence by the striking miners, so in my view it became iconic for political reasons; the violence of this police officer was so unacceptable by any standard. But the experience in the pit villages was that this was typical of the way in which the strike was being policed.

So there was a variety of ways in which the picture was seen – as is the case with all images, of course, depending on the context and on how they are used in relation to the dominant narrative. There were separate narratives about what was actually going on in the miners' strike, and the picture was used differently in those different narratives. The issue of violence was central to both the dominant and oppositional narratives of the strike. We were trying to produce pictures which showed where the violence really lay. The mainstream narrative said that it was the miners who were violent (and undemocratic), and this gave the Labour Party and the trade union leadership the excuse not to back them. We were trying to show that the violence was the organised violence of the state.

Pictures can make difference. People often talk about the Vietnam war be-



The violence of this police officer was so unacceptable by any standard. But the experience in the pit villages was that this was typical of the way in which the strike was being policed

ing lost in the front rooms of America; in fact, of course, it was lost in Vietnam, but because the war was increasingly contested at home, the images of it became hugely significant. So where the dominant narrative is in trouble, photographs can become emblematic and can play an important political and ideological role in changing the world.

*However, the mainstream British press at first dealt with the image by ignoring it entirely, with the exception of the Observer, 24 June 1984, which printed a small version of it as an accompaniment to an article by Nick Davies headed “‘Police make their own law’ in pit war”, although the paper ‘balanced’ it with a picture of an injured policeman. It was not until the Labour MP Jo Richardson produced a copy of the picture at a debate on the policing of the strike at the Labour Party conference on 3 October 1984 that the mainstream press actually acknowledged its existence at all – and then only in order to attempt to trash it. Thus the Mail, 3 October, alleged that the IFL, which it helpfully described as ‘a co-operative of photographers specializing in trade union work for Left-Wing papers’, had ‘offered it only to Left-of-Centre newspapers’ and that ‘other Fleet Street dailies, including the Daily Mail, were never told of its existence’. But whilst it is true that the image was offered **first** to the Left press, there was of course nothing whatsoever to stop other papers applying to the IFL to use it subsequently – as indeed the Observer did. The article also quoted the Police Federation as describing the photograph as ‘inconclusive’, with spokesman Tony Judge adding: ‘A picture is two-dimensional and should be treated with great care. If the police officer was as near to her as the photograph suggests, it’s hard to see how he missed her’. A similar point was made by the same day’s Telegraph. Remarkably,*

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this controversy even made its way into the pages of the august British Journal of Photography, whose November 1984 issue carried an editorial which referred to a photograph which ‘alleged to show a mounted policeman swinging his truncheon towards a woman demonstrator [sic]. The picture was widely circulated as anti-police propaganda and examination of it brings no suspicion of the manipulation which has been suggested. Whether or not the apparent proximity of policeman and demonstrator is an illusion resulting from the foreshortening produced by a long lens is difficult to ascertain and we understand the photographer has denied this. [In fact he was using a wide-angle lens]. The main reason for doubting that the photograph really shows quite what it appears to do is a purely human one. Surely no person being charged by a mounted policeman swinging a truncheon towards her, could possibly maintain the equanimity and freedom from apprehension shown on this woman’s face’.

Lesley Boulton: It’s hardly surprising that the mainstream press first of all just ignored the picture and then tried to undermine it. After all, the photo was an image of a woman holding a camera, not a brick. If you think about it, what does that mean? A woman in her thirties holding a camera, for God’s sake! The media

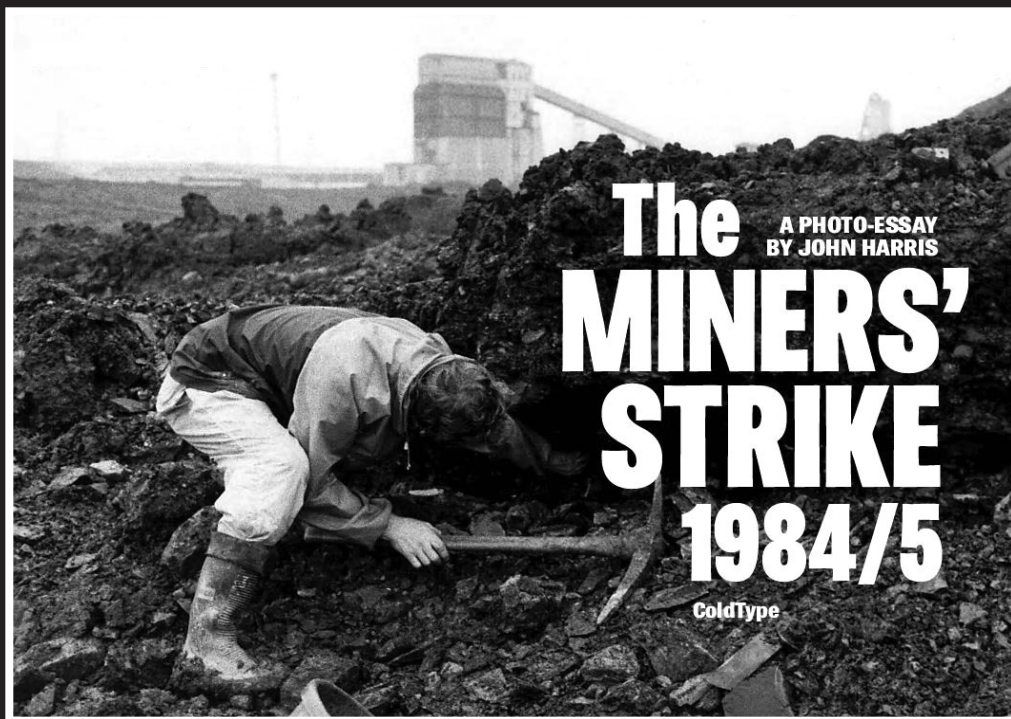


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just couldn’t explain it. The image didn’t fit with their political agenda. So they had to find fault with John and me instead. And it was horrendous, absolutely awful. As a result, I started to receive hate mail. I had two teenage children at the time, and it was very frightening. And it didn’t end there. When I initiated legal proceedings in order to press charges for assault, it became very clear that the police weren’t just going to roll over. I remember giving a statement at my local police station in Sheffield and the whole thing was very intimidating. I was made to feel that it would be unwise for me to pursue the matter through the courts, so I didn’t. The accusation that the photo was somehow montaged was absolutely horrible.

In Nineteen Eighty-Four, George Orwell wrote: ‘If you want a picture of the future, imagine a boot stamping on a human face – forever’. The iconic image of the real 1984 turned out to be not so different – a mounted policeman brutally attacking a defenceless woman who was simply trying to help an injured man. And we would do well to remember that Orwell added: ‘The face will always be there to be stamped upon. The heretic, the enemy of society, will always be there, so that he can be defeated and humiliated over again’.

SEE MORE PHOTOS
OF THE
MINERS' STRIKE
IN THIS CLASSIC
PHOTO ESSAY BY
JOHN HARRIS



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