

Policing the strike, policing rebellion

Joe Rollin highlights how the tactics and methods used by police during the great strike are now commonplace in modern policing

WHEN discussing the miners' strike of 1984/5 it is important to remind ourselves of the scale of the dispute in terms of numbers of strikers, duration, and the response of the government, police, courts and media to the biggest industrial revolt since the Second World War.

Here are some statistics to illustrate the point:

- 165,000 on strike
- 11,313 arrested
- 7,000 injured
- 5,653 put on trial
- 960 sacked
- 200 imprisoned
- 2 killed on the picket lines

So what comparisons can be made with policing trade unionists and activists since the miners' strike? I think the first thing to consider is that the police are constantly learning how to control dissent and when they hit upon a useful tactic they will repeatedly apply it with great effectiveness.

Ogreave on the 18 June 1984 is a good example of this, the police knew and were expecting large numbers of pickets, and were determined to stop another "Saltley Gate" which resulted in a massive victory for the miners in 1972. The police at Orgreave were present in huge numbers and operated with military precision. Pickets talk of being welcomed by the police and even told where to park (in huge contrast to previous picketing experiences where miners were stopped from traveling to their destinations). Once in position the miners were surrounded by the police in a movement than can only be described as similar modern day 'kettling'.

Terrible beatings

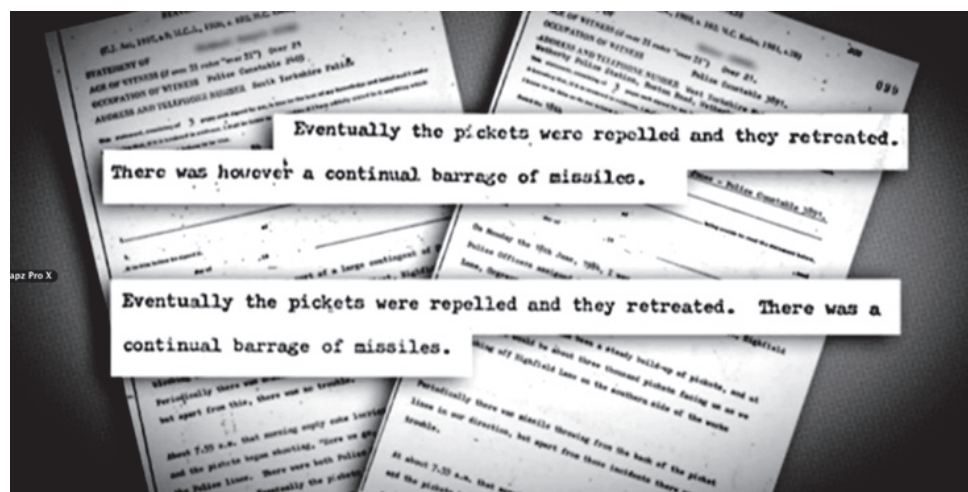
To today's activists kettling is a common occurrence and one which is carried out with great efficiency from the police's point of view. The police at Orgreave also meted out terrible beatings to pickets in an attempt to scare miners. Former officers have admitted to BBC reporter Dan Johnson they had been told to use "as much force as possible" against striking miners and that the police were 'relishing' the chance to get stuck in to the miners.

Both kettling and violence against protesters are used today with recent examples having tragic outcomes such as the death of Ian Tomlinson in the anti-capitalist G20 protests in 2009 (an innocent



Police surround picketing miners as a convoy of coke lorries leaves Orgreave for Scunthorpe steelworks during the miners' strike

Photo: © John Harris /reportdigital.co.uk



Evidence against miners arrested and charged at Orgreave was fabricated. The same sentences were used in all the statements made by different policemen.

man trying to make his way home was trapped by the police kettling and struck by PC Simon Harwood) and the kettling of student protesters in 2010 which again ended in violence this time with student Alfie Meadows being struck on the head and needing an emergency brain operation. Thankfully he survived.

Another common tactic carried out during the miners' strike was mass arrests and the imposition of strict bail conditions on striking miners and their supporters on trumped up charges. These tactics which had two purposes from the point of view of the State: One it gave them valuable information on the individual arrested but moreover the bail conditions would prevent the person from taking part in lawful picketing or demonstrations effectively 'taking them out of the picture'.

This tactic is again now common place in modern policing with recent examples

being the arrest of 146 peaceful UK Uncut protesters (lots of them under the age of 18 and one girl only 15 years old) at Forum & Mason protest at the anti-austerity protest in 2010. More recently the same tactics of mass arrest were used in relation to anti-fascist protesters in 2013 when the Metropolitan Police arrested 160 demonstrators for daring to oppose the English Defence League which marched through Tower Hamlets trying to stir up racial hatred in a largely Muslim Community.

Secret services involved

So what do the police do with all the information gathered on activists? Well we now know that the police were involved with undercover operations on activists which resulted in some officers duping women into false relationships and even fathering children. It's common knowledge that the police and secret services

were involved in operations against the National Union of Mineworkers and the NUM are now 'core participants' in the Undercover Policing inquiry. Furthermore hundreds of arrested miners lost their jobs after the strike and were black-listed. Some of the miners never worked again.

This tactic of blacklisting trade unionists was used with ruthless effect against construction workers where activists were put on register by the 'Consulting Organisation' (in collusion with the police) and companies such as Carillion, Balfour Beatty, Costain, Kier, Laing O'Rourke, Sir Robert McAlpine, Skanska UK and Vinci could pay to see if workers applying for jobs were 'known trouble makers' and then ensure these workers were denied employment opportunities.

The media also plays its part in demonizing trade unionists and activists. In an inspiring story of solidarity during the strike The Sun newspaper had planned to print a front page story showing Arthur Scargill giving a Nazi salute, but the print workers refused to print it.

The BBC also had to admit that it tampered with footage from Orgreave to give the impression that miners attacked police when in fact the footage showed the opposite happening. Today's media is no different and they often hype up expectations of trouble before demonstrations which then gives the police free reign to carry out the tactics discussed above.

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