

SILENCING CRITICAL REPORTING ON GAZA

By Granville Williams

The latest news from Gaza is desperation, starvation, hunger, disease.” These were the opening words in Channel 4’s International Editor, Lindsey Hilsum’s 27 February report.

She wasn’t in Gaza though, but reporting from Tiberius in Israel as images of people desperately chased after supplies being air-dropped onto the beach in Gaza.

She went on, “But one of the things that strikes me here in Israel is that people don’t see any of this. They don’t see these scenes of desperation, the television doesn’t show what you see on the television in Europe, Britain and America.”

Benjamin Netanyahu’s government tries to control critical coverage of the extent of the deaths and destruction after five months of bombing and bombardment by the Israeli Defence Force’s operations in Gaza.

The control takes three forms. One is to block western news organisations reporting independently on the carnage in Gaza. The IDF only allow them in under their control.

This has led to more than 55 foreign correspondents issuing a plea for access to Gaza.

Their open letter on 28 February, sent to both the Israeli and Egyptian embassies in London urged ‘free and unfettered access to Gaza for all foreign media’. They argued that their presence would help them bolster the efforts of local journalists whose safety is at risk.

The second control is a policy



Palestinian journalists use their phones to connect to the internet in Rafah, Southern Gaza on 27 December 2023. Over two months later many of the buildings in the background are rubble.



The Centre for Media Monitoring’s *Media Bias Gaza* report

by the IDF of targeting Palestinian journalists in Gaza. UN independent experts, appointed by the UN Human Rights Council, said they had received ‘disturbing reports that, despite being clearly identifiable

in jackets and helmets marked ‘press’ or travelling in well-marked press vehicles, journalists have come under attack’.

They warned, “This would seem to indicate that the killings, injury, and detention are a deliberate strategy by Israeli forces to obstruct the media and silence critical reporting.”

At least 103 journalists have been killed by Israeli strikes in Gaza in the past five months, according to Reporters Without Borders (7 March). At least 22 of these journalists were killed in the course of their work.

Thirdly, Israel has distributed a stream of disinformation to divert journalists. For example, the story, now discredited, which went out widely that Hamas fighters beheaded up to 40 babies in its 7 October assault.

Such false reports have an impact as an important new report *Media Bias in Gaza 2023-24* by the Centre For Media Monitoring reveals. There were 361 TV news clips where the term ‘beheaded’ AND ‘babies’ were found. Almost 50% of these were on the two right-wing British channels *Talk TV* (27%) and *GB News* (20%) with *Sky News* accounting for (14%). Of the 361 mentions only 52 showed any sufficient challenge, rebuttal or questioning of the claims. **MN**

● The report, published on 6 March, received little publicity in the UK media but deserves to be widely read. You can find it at: <https://cfmm.org.uk/resources/publication/cfmm-report-media-bias-gaza-2023-24/>

Propaganda office saw reds under beds everywhere

Stephen Dorril on the role the Information Research Department played with UK Media

In the last two years hundreds of documents have been released into the National Archives from the Foreign and Commonwealth's Information Research Department (IRD). Some documents released under the Freedom of Information Act have been dispatched by the Foreign and Commonwealth Office (FCO) to Kew from the Orwellian named 'Knowledge Management Department'.

The IRD was a semi-covert and secretive propaganda unit hidden in plain sight within the FCO that had started promoting a 'third way' between communism and capitalism in the late 1940s but by the 1950s had developed into an outright anti-communist operation whose cold warrior staff really did see reds under almost every bed.

In the 1960s it was at its height, expensive, overstaffed and very active both abroad but also, and most importantly, domestically. It provided 'briefings' to dozens of journalists and was engaged in numerous dubious 'special operations', including what today we know as disinformation.

Personal connections

Whilst it appears that operational files have not been retained – the Hart Inquiry into Kinocra (2017) established that the files of the IRD-run Information Policy Unit in Northern Ireland (1971-74) had been both

routinely and deliberately destroyed.

However, there is enough here to confirm almost all of the claims made by investigative journalists (David Leigh, Paul Lashmar and myself) and radical publications (*The Leveller*) in the 1970s-1980s. Some journalists were 'run' by the IRD. It did supply 'briefings' to politicians – mostly Conservative but also a few Labour ones. There were, indeed, substantial links to the anti-Communist labour propaganda outfits such as IRIS and Common Cause.

The files of the IRD-run Information Policy Unit in Northern Ireland (1971-74) had been both routinely and deliberately destroyed

One of the most interesting aspects of the files is detailing the long-term relationship between the BBC and IRD which was regarded by the propaganda outfit as of the highest importance. Cloaked in a veil of secrecy it was largely based on a network of intimate personal connections. *Panorama* was one programme that benefited from 'informal access to the FCO research machine'.

Photo: Thomas McMullan, Anderstontown News, Belfast



A lorry hijacked by dissident republicans blazes in Ardoyne, Belfast, as police deal with bomb scares across Northern Ireland in 2009

One of the early recipients of IRD material was Charles Wheeler, a self-confessed 'Cold Warrior', who acted as an intelligence link on the foreign news-gathering for the propaganda outfit. A new biography of her father Charles Wheeler: *Witness to the Twentieth Century* by Shirlin Wheeler (2023) acknowledges this but doesn't go very deeply into it.

Charolotte Bealing revealed in her thesis (2021) *An Affair Cloaked in Secrecy: The Cold War Relationship Between the BBC and the Information Research Department* that an IRD official, N. H. Marshall, claimed to have three contacts 'whom he has been able to steer' and 'place some material to our advantage'. One is 'Mr Tom Mangold, Current Affairs'.

The main contact to IRD was through Miss Josephine O'Connor Howe, a name that is repeatedly blacked-out in



SMEAR reveals how Harold Wilson was victim of the Secret State

files held at the BBC Archives but is revealed when, as I discovered, the document is held up to the light. She is one of the most important but under-researched figures of the Cold War in terms of propaganda.

She was the custodian of



IRD's annual list of contacts in the Press, Radio and Television, which in 1974 included the BBC's Jim Biddulph, Christopher Serpell and Michael Barrett; Arthus Gavshon (Associated Press); Bridget Bloom (*Financial Times*); Gordon Brook-Shepherd, Peter Gladstone-Smith, Ronald Payne and David Floyd (*Telegraph*); Aidan Crawley (London Weekend); John Dickie (*Mail*); Sandy Gall (ITN); Colin Jackson and Roderick McFarquhar (MPs); Colin Legum (Observer); Hugh O'Shaughnessy (Freelance); Jonathan Steele and Ian Wright (*Guardian*). This is similar to a list that was leaked to the *Leveller*. What the term 'contact' meant in practice is not detailed.

Active involvement

The status of IRD began to change in the early 1970s. The FCO feared that the unit's strident anti-communism was out-of-date and worried that it would become an embarrassment as revelations in the

United States on CIA activities spilled over into the UK. It had been supplying material to right-wing anti-Labour journalists such as Brian Crozier, Robert Moss and Woodrow Wyatt in the run-up to the 1974 General Election, and, fearful of a Labour victory, the domestic unit's activities were severely curtailed and briefings only allowed to a small group of journalists.

A new Foreign Secretary, Anthony Crosland, was its main critic having discovered that IRD was still actively involved in the Italian elections, planting forgeries and disinformation in the press (as it did in Northern Ireland). This was taking place without ministerial approval with FCO senior officials deliberately ignoring the Foreign Secretary's strictures (again as in Northern Ireland).

Ignored

In 1977 Crosland's successor, David Owen, formally closed IRD down but a slimmed-down version known as the Special Production Unit continued to operate under Mrs Thatcher during the anti-CND campaigns (and almost certainly during the 1984-85 miners' strike), and attempts to revive it continue to this day.

It is an old story but it does have contemporary resonance. It is understandable that the media in general and the BBC in particular have mostly ignored it or played it down, largely out of embarrassment. Collusion, the role of propaganda in domestic politics, the 'running' by intelligence of journalists, the planting of briefings are absent from all political histories of the UK in the 20th Century. The general response of academics in the intelligence research field to the revelations is to smile as if they are trivial. It is a very British way of dealing with things. **MN**

Stephen Dorril is an intelligence specialist and author of several books, including Smear! Harold Wilson and the Secret State.



Actor Joanne Froggatt in the role of a frontline hospital consultant in *Breathtaking*

Plays for today

Granville Williams on two ITV dramas which enthused viewers

By the end of February this year ITV had shown two 'state of the nation' dramas: *Mr Bates vs the Post Office* and *Breathtaking*. Both had a big impact on viewers, stimulated public debate and, in the case of the Post Office drama, provoked such public outrage that politicians were forced to act.

Such social issues dramas used to be BBC territory. *Play For Today* ran from 1970-84 and we had other powerful productions: *Boys From The Black Stuff*, five episodes shown in November 1982 on BBC2, and *Our Friends In The North*, shown in nine episodes on BBC2 in early 1996.

So what's changed? The new BBC Head of Drama, Lindsay Salt, talking to her staff in February called for the BBC's drama output to be 'bolder' and 'to redefine "state of the nation" drama...' but there are barriers she will have to crash through to achieve this.

Government pressure

Firstly, a cash-strapped BBC is under government pressure to earn more money from its programmes. It has to have its eyes on international au-

diences. Politically engaged state of the nation issues don't transfer easily into internationally popular drama.

There's a broader political point. The BBC is also constrained by editorial and impartiality guidelines which would have made the BBC cautious of thinking about commissioning *Mr Bates vs the Post Office* whilst the public inquiry is ongoing. In the case of *Breathtaking*, news footage of No 10 press conferences is intercut with the immersive realism of hospital scenes of gasping patients and nurses wearing bin bags. Would Covid news footage have got past the BBC's Editorial Policy Unit?

For ITV the success of the two dramas has, in the words of an ITV staff member I spoke to, left the organisation 'buzzing'. They were, he said, great examples of public service broadcasting.

Here's a final thought. What if the BBC had made *Mr Bates vs the Post Office*? Instead of fulsome praise across the media, papers like the *Daily Mail* would almost certainly have had the BBC in their cross hairs attacking licence funded political propaganda. **MN**

40 YEARS ON: Remembering the Miners' Strike

Documentaries give right of reply to miners

Nick Jones says letting miners and wives tell their stories has produced some vivid television

Television and radio documentaries commemorating the 40th anniversary of the 1984-85 miners' strike have been welcomed for providing a much-needed correction to the news media's original portrayal of the dispute.

"At last people are seeing the strike from a different perspective," says former South Wales miners Ron Stoate. His praise for a series of newly commissioned documentaries drew wide support at a conference in Cardiff held by the Wales Institute of Social and Economic Research and Data (WISERD).

Broadcasters have offered the surviving strikers a right of reply and have delivered what miners and their families believe is a far more accurate account of a defining year in British industrial relations.

Journalists who covered the strike were not needed because the programme producers were determined to hand over the airwaves to the strikers, their families, and others directly involved.

Flashing back and forth between past and present, seeing and hearing archive footage of young miners in their twenties and thirties, and then listening to them again in their sixties and seventies as they relived their experiences provided gripping footage.

This was their right of reply – a chance to tell their story without it being structured, framed, or narrated by the



Dave Roper: "My history with the media, especially the BBC, is they tend to twist what we say..."

news media, especially by the broadcasters whom so many of them despised.

The opening of the BBC 2 documentary *A Frontline Story* explained why veteran BBC correspondents were excluded. The first interviewee, former South Yorkshire miner and striker Dave Roper, had been reluctant to appear:

"My history with the media, especially the BBC, is they tend to twist what we say...it's all about what they want, not what I want to put across."

His contempt for the way the strike had been reported 40 years ago found an echo at the WISERD conference when Ron Stoate, vice chairman of the NUM lodge at the Penallta colliery in the Rhymney Valley,

Swan Films insisted this was the strikers' chance to recall events

told how strikers had been the victims of one-sided reporting.

"We didn't have a platform. There was no balance in the reporting. Forty years on, as a result of these programmes on Channel 4 and the BBC, people are seeing the strike from a different perspective.

"It is too late for us, but I would like to think it's not too late for everyone else in the trade union movement."

Credit for the impact achieved by these programmes is a well-deserved accolade for the work of independent production companies who were commissioned by the BBC, Channel 4, and other channels.

Cutbacks in production and staffing have been accompanied by a significant shift in editorial direction and input. Increasingly programmes like the miners' documentaries are no longer being made in-house by established teams of journalists and producers, but are being outsourced. Independ-

ent companies have brought a fresh eye to what happened in the pit dispute and a different style of presentation.

Swan Films, which produced the three Channel 4 documentaries, insisted this was the strikers' chance to recall events. They provided their own storyline interspersed with excerpts of archive footage from news reports, but the narrative was theirs, not one crafted by a correspondent.

As a BBC journalist from the past, having reported the 1984-85 strike for BBC Radio, I have some doubts as to whether these actuality-led documentaries provide sufficient context.

Brief captions which disappear before they can be read or properly absorbed are, in my opinion, no substitute for a well-crafted script, delivered perhaps by an authoritative journalist or presenter who guides the viewer and listener through the storyline.

These 40th anniversary documentaries are an eye opener, re-awakening interest and addressing nagging issues about how the strike was reported at the time and without the editorialising which caused such offence.

Nothing can excuse the police brutality. The testimony of battered and bloodied pickets – and their recollections 40 years later of how they survived the strike – will stand the test of time.

Indeed, this output has been so powerful TV reviewers and other commentators are wondering if, as the anniversary year progresses, there could be the same kind of momentum that ITV created with *Mr Bates vs the Post Office* to revisit the unresolved scandals that linger on from the strike. **MN**

Photo: BBC/The Garden Productions Ltd

40 YEARS ON: Remembering the Miners' Strike

Paul Routledge on the oral history of the men and women in the miners' strike

Capturing the authentic voice of the strikers

An American politician once remarked, "Everything has been said, but not everybody has said it yet." This adage may profitably be linked to the fortieth anniversary of the miners' Great Strike for Jobs.

In the decades since the year that shook Britain, it feels like everybody has had their two ha'porth. Historians and biographers of Thatcher, the woman herself, her Cabinet ministers, Coal Board boss Ian MacGregor, journalists (including me) and broadcasters: it is impossible to keep Jeremy Paxman away from a good story.

Everything has been said, but not everybody has said it yet. Arthur Scargill, the hero or villain of the dispute, according to your point of view, will present his case at meetings planned in Yorkshire. He has long promised an autobiography, explaining and justifying his role in the most important event in post-war labour history. Will that finally appear?

It's too late to hear from Mick McGahey, vice-president of the NUM, or Lawrence Daly, general secretary for most of the dispute. Both have taken their secrets to the grave. A great pity, on all counts, not just for social history but for the memory legacy of mining communities.

The other missing speaker is the ordinary miner, striker or scab. And his wife, daughter and mother. We have not heard their voice – until now. For the first time, an inquisitive, thoughtful academic has

BACKBONE OF THE NATION:
Mining Communities and the Great Strike of 1984–85

Robert Gildea

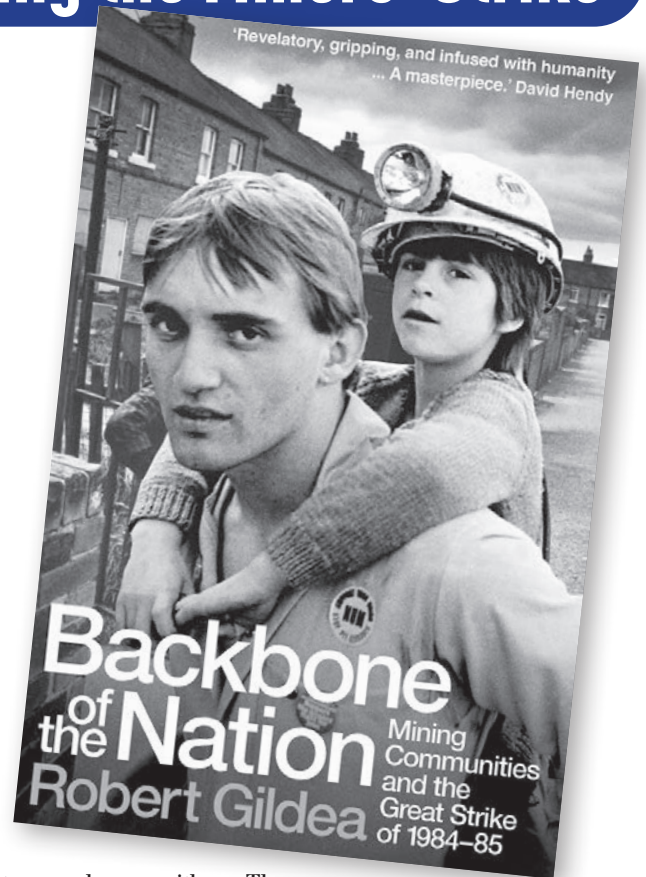
Yale University Press / £25.00

gone out to the coalfields, to the pit villages and clubs, and to homes to ask the people who were on the front line what they think. What happened, why it happened, and what was the impact on their lives.

Robert Gildea, Professor Emeritus of Modern History at Oxford University, visited the coalfields from South Wales to the Midlands, Yorkshire, County Durham and Fife to talk to mining communities for his mammoth book *Backbone of the Nation*. It is a work of homage to those who took part in the strike, described by Paul Mason as 'the definitive oral history'.

I'm not so sure about that, because every generation finds something new to say about events that happened long before their time. But it is unquestionably a start on a project, that really ought to be undertaken by the National Mining Museum, of a comprehensive oral archive, before those who took

Gildea took his tape recorder into miners' homes, and listened. He catches the authentic voice of the men and their families



part are no longer with us. The strikers I knew best are now in their eighties (like me), and memories fade.

Gildea took his tape recorder into miners' homes, and listened. He catches the authentic voice of the men and their families. Take one page completely at random where we hear from Anne Heaton, a cleaner at Welbeck colliery whose husband Harry joined the strike in defiance of the majority of Notts pitmen. Like so many others, she was asked to go to London and speak at a fund-raiser: "All our lives all we've done is looked after our families, washed the dishes, cooked the meals, cleaned the house.

"We've been kitchen sink women all our lives. We've never had to do anything like this. So when you have to stand up and speak, it's terrifying. Your knees shake, your bottom lip shakes. I think we've got more confidence in ourselves. We do things we'd never thought of doing."

Anne, who joined a Women's Action Group, added, "We've all found a common cause. We've found something we believe in and we're pulling the

same way."

That is a recurrent theme in the book: the sense of solidarity, not just across the industry but outside, with gay and lesbian campaigners and other support groups. The Great Strike really was a national event, drawing in people who had never seen a bucket of coal but knew a fight for life when they saw one.

It was a privilege to report the dispute, in my case for *The Times*, as I had the 1972 and 1974 strikes (and the 1969 surface workers walk-out).

Their example stood me in good stead when it came to our turn, a year later, in the Wapping dispute with Rupert Murdoch. I chose the strike, and the sack, rather than scab and kow-tow to the Dirty Digger. That was my debt to the miners. I only wish my fellow journalists had done the same, and the argument still holds good today. There is no guarantee of success if you have a go, only of failure if you don't. **MN**

Paul Routledge has been writing for the Daily Mirror for 20 years. He celebrated his 80th birthday in January.

40 YEARS ON: Remembering the Miners' Strike

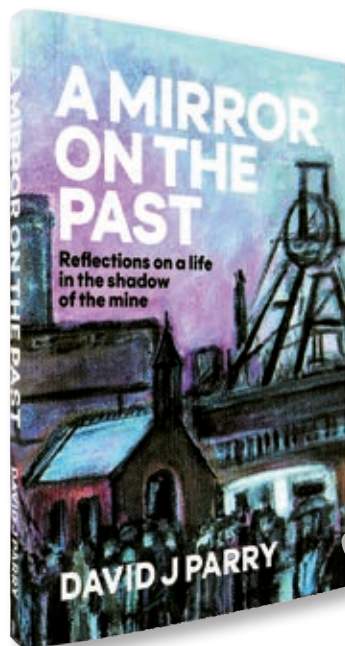
Granville Williams reviews a distinctive memoir by a former Yorkshire miner

A vivid account of a life in the mines

This is a splendid book – honest, clearly written with a vivid insight into the lost world of working life down a pit. Like much of the literature inspired by the mining industry, it's published independently but it provides one of the very best accounts of working underground in the modern mechanised era.

Three generations of David Parry's family worked as miners. His grandfather moved in the 1950s from coal mines in North Wales to Yorkshire, and his father, uncle and brother Neil all worked underground. He started work at Thurcroft Colliery in South Yorkshire as a coalface worker early in 1977 and worked there until the pit closed in 1992.

A stand-out first chapter, *Pit Work*, draws the reader straight into life at the coalface where miners worked with their shovels alongside the



A MIRROR ON THE PAST
Reflections on a Life in the Shadow of the Mine
David J. Parry
www.parrydjpcs.com

mighty machines 'smashing and grinding the coal seam onto the panza (conveyor) on its way on the long trip to the surface'.

There's humour here. He describes working alongside a Dosco Dinthead with 'big Archie, a near silent Scot who was bald but covered with thick body hair...he seemed to revel in all the heavy work and had no interest in the machine. At work in a hot, sticky, dusty heading, he wore a helmet with cap lamp, belt with battery and self rescuer, and boots. No socks, no vest and definitely no shorts or underwear. How he kept his dick out of trouble was a wonder.'

The sections on the 1984-85 strike are essential reading as we assess the great strike on its 40th anniversary. Unlike the 1972 strike when flying pickets and trade union solidarity at Saltley Gate in Birmingham

won the day, striking miners painfully learned this one wasn't in 'the Arthur Scargill book of strike action'.

As another round of pit closures was announced by Heseltine and the Major government in 1992, at David's pit they developed a plan to resist closure with a workers' cooperative. This was scuppered but the struggle continued at Houghton Main where his brother Neil worked.

● **Contact David Parry directly to buy his book. An added bonus is his paintings of mining life which are included in the book.**



The story of the resistance to closure, supported by a women's pit camp, is told in another independent publication, *You Can't Kill The Spirit*. The book is now out of print but Sheffield Women Against Pit Closures have lodged a PDF version of the book with Sheffield Archives. Readers of *MediaNorth* can get a copy by emailing SWAPCPit-Camp1993@gmail.com. **MN**

From the Face to the Head: how it was created

By **Jac Seery Howard**

EDAN's *Shifted* exhibition (5 March - 6 April) addresses the role of women in mining life, culture and politics. My work *From the Face to the Head* (right) was inspired by a coincidence: finding a discarded tool on one of County Durham's despoiled beaches and my research about the WAPC march on London in August, 1984.

23,000 women converged on the capital to support the



striking miners. Chanting and singing, they made their way towards Downing Street, but,

as they neared number 10, they grew silent, donned black head scarves and, as one, turned their heads away from Thatcher's residence. How loud that silence must have sounded.

And how strange that the rusted, discarded, coal-cutting tool I found on the beach at the site of the former Dawdon Colliery should suggest so strongly to me, the profile of a headscarved woman.

I had the inspiration I needed to begin a series of works. The untitled work, seen in the last edition of *MediaNorth* pro-

gressed into a collage suggesting a post industrial landscape, but the addition of some plaster casts taken from the tool added the narrative the piece needed.

In the lower left the semi-circular arrangement of the casts suggests a coal cutter at the 'face', while above ground, a row of the same motifs suggests the 'heads' of marching women, hence the piece's title, *From the Face to the Head*. **MN**

● **For information on EDAN visit www.edanart.co.uk/**

40 YEARS ON: Remembering the Miners' Strike

Context brings clarity to miners' fight

Nick Jones argues that programmes on the miners' strike need more background information

Previously unseen footage in a Channel 4 documentary about the Battle of Orgreave was confirmation, if any was needed, that heavy-handed policing of a mass picket outside the Orgreave coke works in June 1984 descended into unprecedented brutality.

Battered and bloodied pickets were captured on camera by two officials from the National Union of Mineworkers who carried on filming amid the mayhem – footage that had been left for years locked in a cupboard and which was broadcast for the first time.

Hanging loose among scenes of blood and gore were unanswered questions: Why did Monday 18 June 1984 become the 'bloodiest day' of the 1984-85 miners' strike? Why was it the pivotal event in the 'largest police operation in British history'?

Orgreave aggressors

Given the overwhelming evidence that it was the police who were the aggressors at Orgreave, and not the pickets, the raw testimony of men who were there that day, and who went through the subsequent trial, will not only stand the test of time but will also continue to raise nagging questions about the build-up to this infamous confrontation.

Devoting a programme to the tumultuous events in

the divided mining village of Shirebrook was another inspired choice by Channel 4.

But again, an actuality-led documentary based almost entirely on miners and their fam-

Shirebrook was selected because half the workforce lived outside the village

ilies telling their own stories lacked important background information. We needed some context as to what lay behind the rage and raw emotion of a community being torn apart.

North Derbyshire was chosen as the coalfield where the National Coal Board would start enticing men back to



Right-wing national newspapers were consistently hostile to the miners' strike

work. Shirebrook had not become a flashpoint by chance: it was selected because half the 2,000-strong workforce lived outside the village.

There was no mention of the role of the area director Ken Moses and pit manager Bill Steel who instigated a concerted effort to break the strike with almost military precision.

They concentrated their initial efforts on making contact with those miners whose homes were furthest away from the immediate vicinity of the pit as the greater the distance from the mine, the less likelihood there was that miners and their families would fear intimidation.

Ordnance survey maps, pinned up at the offices of the board's area headquarters, indicated the very villages and streets where the miners lived. This attention to detail paid off: North Derbyshire had a faster rate of return than any other coalfield.

Moses believed strongly in the importance of using the news media to promote the return to work, a tactic which I explored in my book *Strikes and the Media* (1986).

Full page advertisements appeared regularly in the *Derbyshire Times* listing the pits in the North Derbyshire coalfield, the number of NUM members on the books at each colliery and the number of men at work.

In the Orgreave documentary there were few, if any, clues as to why this had become the largest police operation of the strike with up to 6,000 officers lining up against as many or more pickets.

Haunting Thatcher

We needed some context, and perhaps the guiding hand of a narrator. Scargill wanted to repeat his 1972 victory at the 'Battle of Saltley Gate' in Birmingham when 800 police caved in to 30,000 protestors and Ted Heath was forced to concede a 27% pay rise to the NUM.

● Continued on Page 8

