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Introduction

> Police riot squads were used yesterday and several mounted police charges were made. Throughout the day missiles of every size and type were hurled towards police lines . . .
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> There were pitched battles inside the coking plant for the first time since picketing began, and the frustration on both sides spilled over into sickening scenes of miners being batoned and of police being attacked with bricks, slivers of glass as well as . . . containers of fuel.[1]

Contemporary events, particularly in an age when most of us receive information secondhand via the media, tend to crystallise into certain dominant images. For many, mention of the miners' strike of 1984 is enough to conjure up pictures of violent confrontations between stone-throwing pickets and baton-wielding police. Such scenes, which seem more reminiscent of the almost forgotten conflicts of social history than modern industrial disputes, inevitably raise issues about the nature of policing and picketing in the 1980s.

One such issue concerns the degree of violence associated with contemporary industrial confrontation. It is readily, perhaps too readily, assumed by commentators of all political views that violent incidents such as that described at the head of this chapter constitute a significant escalation of disorder. Not surprisingly, those at either end of the political spectrum tend to blame each other for the assumed increase in violence. The left point the finger unhesitatingly at the forces of law and order, suggesting that the massive police presence in the coalfields and the use of tactics like the baton-charge have played a major part in bringing about increased levels of violence. At a more sophisticated level this kind of argument develops into the 'strong state' thesis; a theoretical standpoint which identifies the economic crisis of modern capitalism as a motivating force for social polarisation and industrial militancy.[2] This trend, according to the theory, in turn leads to the state maximising repression as the only means of maintaining the *status quo*. The right, a grouping by no means limited to the Conservative Party, equally unhesitatingly attribute picket-line violence to the strikers and vociferously denounce it as an attack on the rule of law and

ultimately democracy itself. For them, violent picketing is simply an attempt by the criminally minded to resist the imposition of law and order, a development which requires firm policing.

There are features of both these positions that need to be subject to closer scrutiny so that a clearer understanding of what is going on can emerge. The shared assumption that industrial confrontation is becoming more violent needs to be examined; a detailed historical analysis is necessary to establish precisely how the nature of industrial confrontation has changed and to explain why these changes have occurred.

Such a study would not only plug a gap in the existing literature – somewhat surprisingly there has been comparatively little research on policing in general let alone the policing of industrial disputes – but also enable many of the more controversial aspects of contemporary industrial confrontation to be seen in their historical context. For example, concern generated by the establishment of Police Support Units and the National Recording Centre, about a *de facto* national police force, can be viewed in relation to a changing pattern of formal and informal control of policing policy. Similarly, police riot tactics can be seen not as an isolated development but as a more recent manifestation of a continuing response to industrial disorder.

The main purpose of this book is to question and modify widely held assumptions about the nature of industrial disorder by reaching back beyond the present. The accurate characterisation of historically distinct patterns of confrontation is a prerequisite both for the development of explanatory theory and a better informed public debate.

Methodology

A study of documents such as newspaper reports, parliamentary reports, letters and telegrams sent to and from the Home Office, autobiographies, police and trade union histories was necessary in order to discover how industrial disputes were policed in the past. Fortunately, quite detailed information was discovered. For example, material relating to the South Wales Coal Strike of 1910 includes all the communications between the Home Office and the local Chief Constable, the reports of Home Office officials, senior army officers and the autobiography of the police and army commander.

In order to discover how the major industrial disputes of more recent times – the miners' strikes of 1972, 1974 and 1984–5, the Grunwick dispute of 1976–8 and the steel strike of 1980 – were policed, a number of interviews have been conducted with senior police officers and union officials.

Eleven police forces that have had recent experience of industrial disputes were approached, nine agreed to co-operate with the research project and two refused (see Table 1). The Greater Manchester Police declined to co-

Table 1. *Police forces that co-operated with the research project*

Force	Officers interviewed
Kent County Constabulary	2
Humberside Police	1
Lincolnshire Police	1
Metropolitan Police	3
Nottinghamshire Constabulary	1
South Wales Constabulary	2
South Yorkshire Police	1
West Midlands Police	1
West Yorkshire Police	2
Total	14

operate on the grounds that they were too busy dealing with Home Office researchers following the summer riots of 1981, while Derbyshire Constabulary refused because they had less relevant experience than some other forces.

Those forces that did agree to provide research facilities then nominated a senior officer or officers to be interviewed. As well as these formal interviews informal conversations about the policing of industrial disputes were held with 18 other officers. Altogether 32 policemen were interviewed ranging in rank from Constable to Chief Constable (see Table 2). In addition to these interviews public order training at two police training establishments was observed and the Bramshill Police Staff College was visited on three occasions. The visits to Bramshill were made to interview members of staff, to use the library facilities and to talk to officers attending a course on industrial disputes.

As well as police officers 50 union officials were interviewed during the autumn of 1981. Thirty branch secretaries of the National Union of Mineworkers (NUM) were interviewed together with 20 officials of the Iron and Steel Trades Confederation (ISTC). These respondents were selected at random from lists provided by the Yorkshire and Nottinghamshire area headquarters of the NUM and the Sheffield and Humberside regions of the ISTC. Many of the NUM officials had experience of picketing during the Grunwick dispute and the 1980 steel strike as well as during the miners' strikes of the early 1970s. In addition informal conversations were held with 19 members of the NUM during the 1984 coal strike.

All formal interviews were tape-recorded and lasted from a minimum of forty minutes to a maximum of two hours. The average interview lasted about one hour and fifteen minutes. Of course, the advantages of tape-

Table 2. *Numbers and ranks of officers interviewed (formally and informally)*

Rank	
Chief Constable	1
Assistant Chief Constable	1
Chief Superintendent	3
Superintendent	6
Chief Inspector	4
Inspector	11
Sergeant	4
Constable	2
Total	32

recording are precise reproduction of what is said and discussion uninterrupted by note taking. However, a possible disadvantage is greater inhibition when talking about controversial matters. For this reason all respondents were encouraged to continue the conversation after the tape-recorder had been switched off. Immediately after each interview notes were made from memory of any unrecorded material. In this way it was thought that the best of both the recorded and the unrecorded worlds could be obtained.

The trade unionists enthusiastically co-operated with the research project and openly discussed controversial and sometimes incriminating matters on tape. The police were more cautious and tended to make their most interesting comments after the tape-recorder had been switched off. Most of the union officials automatically assumed that the interviewer was sympathetic towards them and hostile to the police. The police officers tended to make the same assumption. One officer commented 'I'll take my jacket off now because I expect we'll end up scrapping';[3] another accused the interviewer of being a 'political extremist' who had stolen university writing paper in order to gain an interview with him.[4] An Assistant Chief Constable bluntly stated 'You're as biased and as devious as can be.'[5] Overcoming this initial police hostility proved to be easier than one might have supposed. Indeed, there was a certain amount of mock hostility – a deliberate probing of the interviewer to test reactions to allegations of bias and political extremism. After a sometimes hostile start every police respondent settled down to a cordial discussion about the various aspects of policing industrial disputes.

Outline of the book

The next chapter focuses on the use of police and troops to combat industrial disorder during the period from 1893 to 1909, a period which included the infamous 'Featherstone shootings'. In Chapter 3 attention is focused on the increasing use of the police as an order maintaining force during the four years preceding the First World War; the 'Tonypandy riots' of 1910 and the 'Llanelli shootings' are among the incidents examined. The inter-war period is the subject of Chapter 4 which considers the police strikes of 1918 and 1919 and the General Strike of 1926 among others. Chapter 5 addresses itself to the policing of industrial disputes during the period from 1945 to 1980 and includes a discussion of the miners' strikes of the early 1970s, the Grunwick dispute of 1976–8 and the steel strike of 1980.

Some of the factors which have motivated the changes revealed by our investigation are considered in Chapter 6, while the penultimate chapter focuses on industrial confrontation in the 1980s. Our final chapter, as one might expect, states the conclusions and implications of the study.

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Stoning and shooting

> About 9.15 p.m. the magistrate, Mr Hartley, determined that there was no alternative except to fire. A written order was given to Captain Barker to that effect, and Mr Hartley asked him in the first instance to fire with blank cartridge. Captain Barker replied that he had no blank cartridge, and that to use it was against the regulations. Mr Hartley then asked Captain Barker to fire as little as possible. The word was given for a file of two men to fire, the front man kneeling and the rear man standing, and the file was directed to fire at the ground line. The stone throwing still continued while the men were preparing to fire. 'It did not cease for a moment', said Captain Barker. One of the two men firing was struck in the face when he had the rifle at the present. The report of the rifles was followed by silence for a few seconds, but there were then cries from the crowd of 'Go on, it's only blanks', and the stone throwing was resumed. In about five or six minutes Captain Barker, as the shower of stones continued, gave an order for a section of eight men to fire one volley. One soldier, while on the knee and about to fire, had his helmet knocked off by a missile. After the troops had fired the second time, there was a cry from the crowd that two men had been shot.[1]

The first industrial dispute to be described and analysed is also the most violent that will be considered. Two miners were killed and some fourteen others were injured when troops opened fire on strikers in 1893 at Featherstone in West Yorkshire. Although the military were called out on several occasions to deal with disorder associated with industrial disputes during the period between 1893 and 1909, it was only at Featherstone that they actually resorted to shooting. Usually, the implicit threat of shooting that the mere presence of the military conveyed was sufficient to ensure the rapid dispersal of strikers. So the response to disorder revealed by the following account of the Featherstone shootings is both typical and atypical. It is typical in the sense that troops were frequently mobilised and deployed during industrial disputes at this time, but is atypical in that they usually achieved their objectives without abruptly reducing the workforce by discharging their firearms at point blank range.

The aim of our chronology and analysis of the events at Featherstone is to

identify specific forms of collective action and order maintenance. Once such a basic pattern of action and reaction has been distilled from the welter of historical facts it becomes possible to chart subsequent modifications of and reversions to the original forms of behaviour. In other words Featherstone provides us with a starting point from which to map the twists and turns in the history of industrial conflict.

The Featherstone shootings 1893: chronology

During the last week of July and the first week of August 1893 miners in many districts either went on strike or were locked-out by their employers. In the West Riding of Yorkshire, where the most violent incidents associated with the strike occurred, over 80,000 men stopped work and 250 pits closed down.[2]

The first disorder occurred on 31 July at the Morley Main Colliery near Dewsbury where between 70 and 100 banksmen had volunteered to continue working during the strike.[3] Naturally, this incensed the strikers who collected at the colliery entrance to jeer and throw stones at the 'blackleg' banksmen. Local police from Dewsbury eventually arrived and succeeded in dispersing the crowd without further violence. However, the following day more serious disorder occurred. According to a report in *The Times* some 4,000 strikers attacked the men who were still working, the 'knobsticks' as they were called, and their police escort before being subjected to repeated baton-charges.[4] But this incident proved to be something of an exception as all remained quiet throughout the West Riding until 30 August when there was another slight disturbance at the Middleton Colliery near Leeds. Once again a small force of police was immediately despatched and order was quickly restored. The strike seemed to be following the pattern of long periods of calm briefly interrupted by isolated incidents of disorder which the police quickly put down. Indeed, Captain Russell, the Chief Constable, was so untroubled by the situation that, in late August, he left the district for a holiday in Scotland. His action reveals a remarkable degree of confidence especially as 259 constables, nearly a quarter of the entire West Riding force, were sent to keep the peace at the Doncaster Races which began on 4 September. Such a drastic reduction in manpower must have seriously affected the capability of the police to deal with outbreaks of disorder. Nevertheless, Captain Russell obviously felt that the situation was sufficiently well in hand to justify his absence.

In the event the Chief Constable's confidence proved to be misplaced for on Monday 4 September minor incidents of disorder occurred at Garforth and the following day witnessed an extension of the disturbances to the Barnsley area. Mr Gill, the Deputy Chief Constable, sent home those Barnsley constables who were on duty at Doncaster and arranged for 188

men from other districts in the West Riding to be drafted into the troubled area. He also sent the following telegram to Captain Russell in Scotland: 'Serious disturbance around Barnsley. Two pits wrecked but all quiet now. Have made all necessary police arrangements. Gill.'[5] Gill, it seems, saw no immediate need for more extreme measures, but this was not a view shared by everyone. At a special meeting of the Barnsley magistrates, held that evening, it was decided that military intervention was required and Gill was instructed to take a requisition to the General commanding the Northern Division at York the next morning. After the meeting the Deputy Chief Constable sent another telegram to his chief which was much less optimistic than its predecessor. 'Serious disturbance expected about Barnsley and Rotherham. I am arranging for military to be in readiness. Doncaster rather crippled me but can manage. Write.'[6] There is a distinct difference in tone between the two communications; a modulation caused, it is suggested, by the influence of the magistrates rather than by any change in the prevailing situation.

In the event Captain Russell received both telegrams within minutes of each other, at approximately 8.10 a.m. on Wednesday the 6th and immediately decided to return to Yorkshire by the next available train. A third telegram from Gill was forwarded on from Scotland in time to be handed to him at York. 'Further riots in Lancashire Division (which means Doncaster Division), and I have obtained order for military just now signed by General Wilkinson. I think you had better return. Urgent. Gill.'[7] Each of Gill's three telegrams is more alarmist than its predecessor. Yet there is no evidence to suggest that the police were unable to restore order or indeed that any significant rioting had taken place.[8] Nevertheless, Captain Russell had been recalled and the military summoned. Such was the general state of affairs in the West Riding up to Thursday 7 September, and it is now necessary to concentrate on the events which transpired at the Ackton Hall Colliery in Featherstone.

Before the strike about 400 men had been employed at the Ackton Hall Colliery as underground workers and about an equal number as surface men who were mainly engaged in building and fitting out new works that were extending the existing buildings. When the strike began in late July all the underground men had been locked out while the surface men continued in employment. Despite this divisive and potentially dangerous situation – the surface workers were bound to be regarded as 'blacklegs' – no disorder of any kind occurred during the first month of the strike at Featherstone. However, this tranquil state of affairs was not to last.

At midday on Tuesday 5 September a crowd of 'men, women and lads' marched into the colliery yard and demanded that the loading of 'smudge' – an operation which the surface men had been carrying out since before the lock-out – be discontinued.[9] The loading of 'smudge' did not involve the get-

ting or working of coal, but it was used to raise steam for the surface engines and surplus amounts were being sold to other collieries. In the event the surface workers, apparently intimidated by the strikers who were armed with sticks and cudgels, decided to discontinue loading.

On the following day, no doubt spurred on by their earlier success, a large number of strikers again visited the colliery and prevented loading. On this occasion, however, they also sent a deputation to see Mr Holiday, the pit manager, with the intention of obtaining an assurance that no more 'smudge' would be extracted and loaded. Holiday went some way towards meeting the strikers' demands by agreeing that henceforth 'smudge' would only be loaded for colliery use and not for sale. With this the deputation appeared satisfied and the crowd dispersed. It is worth emphasising that so far no personal injury or even damage to property had occurred, although there is no doubt that many of the surface workers had been severely frightened. Moreover, once an agreement regarding the loading of 'smudge' had been reached the danger of serious disorder appeared to decline.

However, on Thursday the 7th a crowd of 200 strikers entered the colliery yard and tipped over eight waggon-loads of 'smudge'. Some of the waggons had old tickets on them labelled 'Bradford' and it seems that the crowd was convinced that Holiday was disregarding the previous day's agreement.[10] This misunderstanding leading to a relatively trivial act of lawlessness set in motion a chain of events that culminated twelve hours later in the shooting of sixteen people. The steps in this fatal nexus are clear.

Holiday, no doubt outraged at the vandalism done to his 'smudge' waggons, set off to activate the machinery of social control. As there were only three constables on permanent duty in Featherstone he drove in a dog-cart to Pontefract to request more substantial police protection for the men loading 'smudge'. However, the Pontefract police were unable to help him in this respect as they had received many similar requests and had no men available to assist him. Holiday returned to Featherstone only to find that the strikers had tipped over another seven waggons during his absence. Enough was clearly enough. Holiday caught the midday train to Wakefield with the intention of demanding assistance from the Chief Constable.

At Wakefield police station Holiday was joined by Lord St Oswald, a magistrate and coal owner, who had come on a similar mission. Both men urged the Chief and Deputy Chief Constables to provide protection for their respective pits. When Captain Russell told them that he had no spare manpower available they appealed for military aid. The Chief Constable obediently sent a requisition for soldiers to York only to be told by the military authorities that they too had no available men to send. At this stage Holiday must have despaired of ever obtaining protection for his 'smudge' loaders. However, he need not have worried, for the Deputy Chief Constable contacted the army barracks at Bradford and 50 infantry were

immediately despatched for Wakefield by train. It was agreed that if Gill could not arrange for a magistrate to accompany the troops to Featherstone he would telephone Holiday who would then attempt to secure the services of one himself. Satisfied with these arrangements Holiday and Lord St Oswald, who did not need a magistrate since he was one himself, returned to their collieries.

So, after a few false starts the machinery of order maintenance had been finally set in motion. But a misunderstanding was to occur which may have ultimately contributed to the tragic events that followed.

Later that same afternoon the manager of the Sharleston Colliery called on the Chief Constable and, like Holiday and Lord St Oswald, requested police or military assistance. Captain Russell reassured him that troops were on their way and that adequate protection would be provided for the Sharleston Colliery. The manager then secured the services of Mr Clay, a magistrate who had been closeted in the Wakefield Country Club, and accompanied the Chief Constable to the station to meet the soldiers from Bradford. It was at this point that a misunderstanding occurred between Gill and Clay. In his evidence to the committee of inquiry into the subsequent events Gill stated that he asked Clay to meet the soldiers at Sharleston *station* and if all was quiet to accompany them on to Featherstone.[11] According to Clay he was simply asked to meet the troops at Sharleston *Colliery*, no mention being made of going on to Featherstone.[12] In any event Clay and the Sharleston manager returned to the colliery to await the arrival of troops and never went to Sharleston station at all. The effect of this misunderstanding was, as will be made clear, that troops eventually arrived at Featherstone unaccompanied by a magistrate and were therefore reluctant to take any positive action and so totally failed to overawe the crowd.

Meanwhile, Holiday had returned to Featherstone to find that a crowd of about 200 miners, women and pit boys had visited the colliery in his absence and had smashed many of the office windows. However, the crowd had dispersed before his return and he found that all was now quiet.[13]

At about 3.30 p.m. a Captain Barker and 54 men of the South Staffordshire Regiment arrived at Wakefield station. An impromptu council of war was held on the station platform during which Gill urged Captain Barker to divide his men into two groups, one to be sent to Lord St Oswald's colliery at Nostell and the other to Featherstone via Sharleston. At first Captain Barker was somewhat reluctant to divide his relatively small force but eventually agreed to do as Gill suggested. Twenty-five men under a lieutenant left on a branch line for Nostell while the remaining 28 men, commanded by Captain Barker, continued on the main line to Featherstone. Gill informed Captain Barker that a magistrate would meet him at Featherstone station and that on the way he should look out at Sharleston for any sign of disorder. If there were trouble at Sharleston the troops were to stop and deal with it