

Abstract (English)

The 1984-85 miners' strike has become a symbol for the fight about the British welfare state in the 1980s. Arne Hordt's thesis attempts to examine the extant literature about the strike in the light of the latest developments in British and European contemporary history. It concludes that the examined literature constitutes a source for 1980s history rather than historical research itself.

The author takes up Jost Dülffer's demand for a European History of the Modern Age and goes on to develop criteria for a new social history of industrial conflicts. He employs these criteria to contextualize and deconstruct the historical language of the 1980s, with its influential concepts of "industrial decline", "structural change", "Thatcherism" and "class conflict", which remain widely used today.

Hordt observes that there are three distinct and largely unchanged historical interpretations of the miners' strike, which are rooted in the conflict itself. However, these patterns; the new-labour narrative, the tradition of sympathetic research, and the school of industrial relations, have remained within a contemporary framework of industrial decline and class conflict. This means that contemporary interpretations of the miners' strike can no longer be seen as valid contributions to historical research, but rather as sources for contemporary discourse on the strike.

The author concludes with an appeal for new approaches towards researching the 1984-85 miners' strike. These will have to take account of the methodology of contemporary history and set the strike into the adequate European and regional contexts. Protest in heavy industrial regions has to be reconsidered in a regional European perspective and with a view to a 'short' twentieth century. Those interpretations which can be found in the contemporary sources for the late twentieth century are subject to a one-sided narrative of decline. Rather than reiterate this narrative, historians should not limit themselves to the nation-state and highlight variability and open-endedness when researching accelerated social change and large scale protest in the recent past.