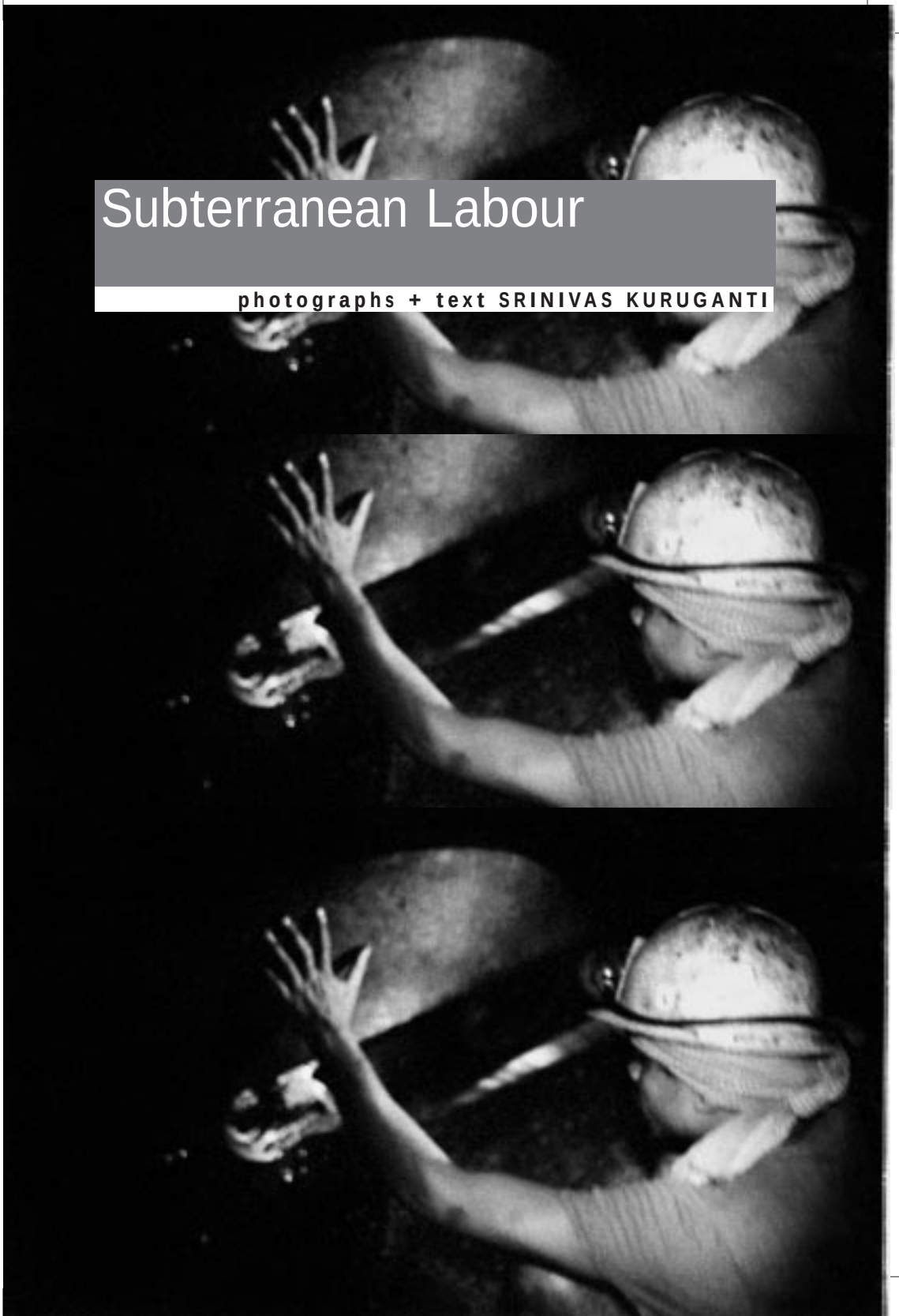
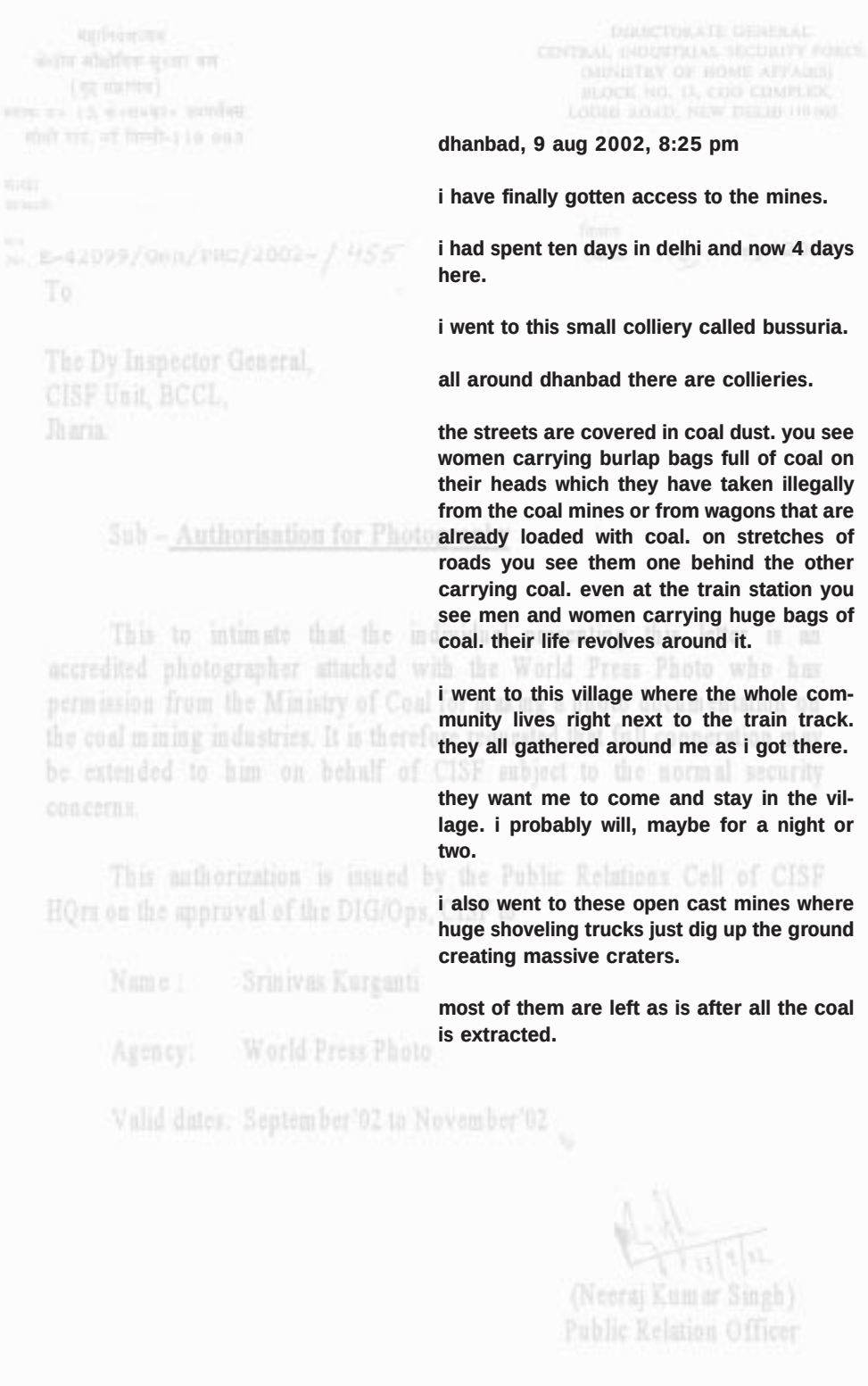


Subterranean Labour

photographs + text SRINIVAS KURUGANTI



DIRECTORATE GENERAL
CENTRAL INDUSTRIAL SECURITY FORCE
(MINISTRY OF HOME AFFAIRS)
BLOCK NO. 13, CGO COMPLEX,
LODHI ROAD, NEW DELHI-110 003

No. E-42099/Gen/PRC/2002-/455

To

The Dy Inspector General,
CISF Unit, BCCL,
Jharia.

Sub – Authorisation for Photography

This to intimate that the in[illegible] is an accredited photographer attached with the World Press Photo who has permission from the Ministry of Coal for [illegible] the coal mining industries. It is therefore requested that full cooperation may be extended to him on behalf of CISF subject to the normal security concerns.

This authorization is issued by the Public Relations Cell of CISF HQrs on the approval of the DIG/Ops.

Name : Srinivas Kurganti

Agency: World Press Photo

Valid dates: September'02 to November'02

(Neeraj Kumar Singh)
Public Relation Officer

dhanbad, 9 aug 2002, 8:25 pm

i have finally gotten access to the mines.

i had spent ten days in delhi and now 4 days here.

i went to this small colliery called bussuria.

all around dhanbad there are collieries.

the streets are covered in coal dust. you see women carrying burlap bags full of coal on their heads which they have taken illegally from the coal mines or from wagons that are already loaded with coal. on stretches of roads you see them one behind the other carrying coal. even at the train station you see men and women carrying huge bags of coal. their life revolves around it.

i went to this village where the whole community lives right next to the train track. they all gathered around me as i got there.

they want me to come and stay in the village. i probably will, maybe for a night or two.

i also went to these open cast mines where huge shoveling trucks just dig up the ground creating massive craters.

most of them are left as is after all the coal is extracted.

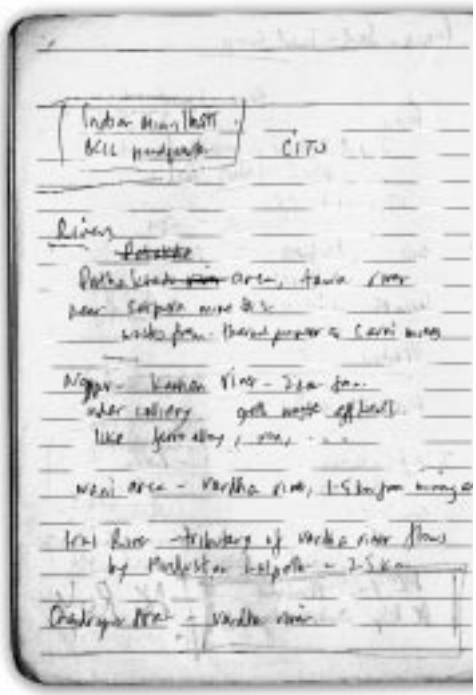
you also see many men on bicycles carrying massive bags of coal through the streets. the streets always seem kind of hazy partly because of the coal dust that is in the air. really hot today.

this private taxi driver walked up to me today, the same person who drove me around on my last trip here. he's going to be taking me around.

dhanbad is known to be a very lawless place. there used to be – at one point – daylight shootings, many of them, rapes... things are better but not great. i was told by many people to be careful photographing people because they can do things to you... there is a big coal mafia here and one apparently has to be very careful of them.

the police are very ineffective here.
lot of illiteracy too. one of the most corrupt states in india.
tomorrow i have to get to the coal mines at around 7:00 am.
a sikh family runs the cyber café that i use, they also have a restaurant besides other businesses.

i've become very friendly with the two sons. they were talking to me about how this palmist had come to stay at their hotel on a month-to-month basis and left without paying the month's rent. they then sent two guys with guns to his house in a different town and threatened him. it seems that the guy is going to be paying them very, very shortly.



dhanbad 12 august

every step you take, some one asks you

1. who are you?

2. where did you come from?

3. what is this for?

4. what is your "benifeet"?

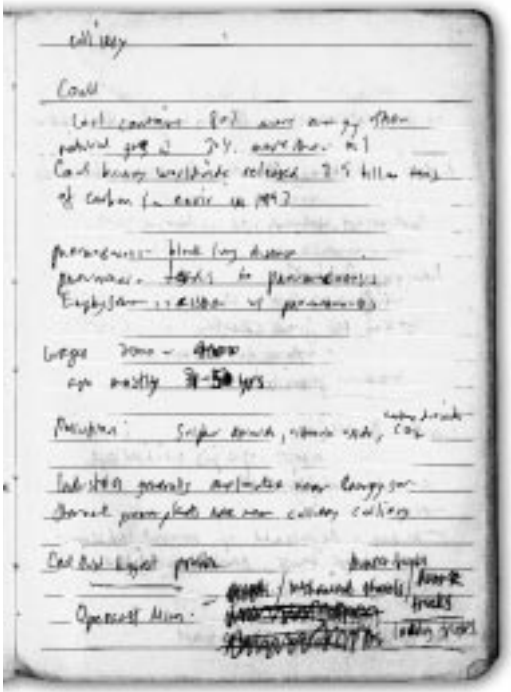
5. is the sarkar/govt paying you to do this?

6. do you have permission?

7. take my photo!!

8. hold the basket/shovel. take his photo!!!

9. look! he's taking your photos. stand straight!



14 august

even the officials who try to be helpful don't realise that there is so much work involved in taking photos. they think one just goes there and takes a ‘snap’ and the story is done. they like to give you a guided tour and expect that the photos will be done in a few minutes. i have in the past three weeks met at least 30 officials who have the power to give me permission but no one wants to take the responsibility. they’re all afraid.

14 august

yesterday, i had gone back to the place where they wash the coal. i got there early because i thought i would get an early start. the project officer there had given me permission to come back whenever i wanted to. i started to walk around with a safety inspector and suddenly a CISF (central industrial security officer) stopped me. he said that i couldn't take photos there without the permission of his supervisor. he then walked me over to his supervisor to get permission. his supervisor said that i need written permission from the P.O. i then went to the P.O. he said that i need written permission from coal india limited, only then he could write me a letter. i called the personnel director's office and none of those guys were around.

the security guys showed up again and said that they wouldn't let me leave till i got written permission. there was another administrative guy who was really helpful. the CISF guys just stood there while we were trying to make calls. and of course the phones weren't working right. we were in this office for almost about 4 hrs. we then told them that i would have to go to the coal india office to get permission. they said that then i would have to deposit my camera and all my film with them. i basically knew that no one would give me written permission. everyone is scared to have their name on paper.

EXCAVATIONS