

Picket

no. 10

Sunday 4th May 1986

Sunday 20th April, Southampton

At the Chilworth roundabout, Bassett, at 5.30pm, a group of Wapping scabs are happily boarding a Coliseum Co coach for their fun-filled and lucrative journey 70 miles north. Fifty are already seated, most having joined the coach at other points; most of them enjoying the chance to settle back and relax. But on to the end of the slowly-moving queue is tagging one of our number, who gently enquires of the driver: "This one all right for Wapping mate?" in his best south-London accent. The driver smiled from behind his sunglasses and replied: "Right." Still no suspicions are raised, as banter and greetings are exchanged by Southampton's finest. Then it happened; the unthinkable spectacle of the face-to-face address by a picket to Murdoch's mercenaries. They sat in stunned silence for nearly five minutes, the coach driver now ashen-faced and rooted to his seat, as the picket rained down home truths and insults upon his captive audience. At the rear two youngsters, probably fresh off Maggie's YOP scheme, tried to start the coachload chanting "Get off the coach, you bum". Nobody picked this up, and the chant died out in a welter of obvious embarrassment. Weakly, a big ginger-haired man of about 35 asked our picket if he would mind leaving the coach as they were late, please. Smiling broadly, our picket happily agreed now that there could be no doubt that the message had got across. Having the last word, he finally turned to the coach driver and quipped: "I bet you are glad I am not the PLO or worse!". The coach pulled out on to the A33, and the sighs of relief that there weren't more of us around could be heard for miles....

Friday 25th April, Wapping

Our first encounter with the police came in Leman Street when 12 pickets were confronted by a contingent from the local nick. They looked as though they had just got out of bed. A loudmouthed sergeant told us that it was his law that we could not walk in Leman Street and if we broke his law then he would see to us. His tone suggested he was more interested in kicking than nicking. We later found out that this was the spot where scabs board the coaches. Our second encounter came at the main gate which we had taken over quite peacefully. Reinforcements were brought in from all over. They immediately waded into us and seemed to enjoy pulling the women by their hair. Perhaps that's what turns them on. We held our ground for 30 minutes, until, on the sensible advice of our leader, we slowly advanced to Wellclose. This was only through lack of numbers, otherwise we could have held it all day. But after all those weeks this was our best victory to date. Now that we know that the main gate at Wapping can be taken let's do it again and again.

Saturday 26th April, Wapping

It was proved that marching up and down The Highway with banners could be a very effective weapon if only it was taken up by more people. If, instead of lounging on the railings and guarding the tea wagons and shouting encouragement from the sidelines, the majority of so-called demonstrators had in fact demonstrated then the three white vans taken by surprise would not have got away so easily. It may not stop the presses, but at least it got the brave boys in blue out of their coaches and caused Inspector Brown (or Jones or Smith) or whatever his name to definitely lose his cool by punching and arresting a 16-year-old who allegedly hit the inspector while holding the banner with both hands.

Perhaps this would all come about more easily if an organiser could be found who could organise the organisers.

Monday 28th April, Milton Keynes

Two coaches of pickets arrived at MK Central Station and the Coach Station to greet our marchers and to barrack scab coaches. The opposition decided not to play, and were not seen at the scab pick-up point. There was a combined trek to the local Trades Council Hall where the marchers were fed and a meeting was held. The debate was interesting - with the speakers from outside the print well-informed. The meeting was marred by the arrest of four of our young marchers who, frustrated with the goings-on, were provoked into conflict by some local teenagers abusing the dispute.

Tuesday 29th April, TNT depots Byfleet/Snodland

First hit was Byfleet, Surrey at midnight. Of the 80 pickets some who arrived early formed a gauntlet as TNT were obviously warned. The depot was promptly evacuated just before midnight. Good conversations were held with one artic and a number of the line of white vans racing out. In fact, the artic enjoyed the conversation that much that he returned for a second helping a few minutes later. As the horse had bolted most of the blockade was lifted at 1.45am

The next hit was Snodland, Kent at 3am. Some managed to have a bit of conversation with some vans, but most of the trucks were hiding in the area, approaching then shooting away. This was followed by a withdrawal to Wrotham roundabout chasing TNT vans out of their pre-arranged meet. Then pickets chased back to Snodland. There was one arrest - which could perhaps have been prevented if pickets had moved in quickly.

One lesson from this picket was to organise a pre-arranged meet to control the simultaneous arrival of the pickets.

Wednesday morning, 30th April, Bouverie Street

We arrived at Bouverie Street at 7.30am to find that our pickets had already been told to move off. Six pickets on each door we were told, the rest were to get out of Fleet Street and Blackfriars. After Saturday night at Wapping we weren't going to give in without a fight, so we walked up and down Bouverie Street, continuously moving, for we knew only too well that if we stopped moving we would be whisked away by the boys in blue. We outsmarted them. Instead of breaking up and leaving the area we stayed together and became even more determined to do our job. Murdoch's muppets seemed somewhat frustrated as we walked up and down Bouverie Street, sarcastically grinning as we passed by. They watched our every move. They stopped many of the pickets from entering Bouverie Street and made a few arrests but we kept marching on. Pickets were keeping an eye on a WPC nicknamed "Big Bertha". She was definitely out for a nick.

The sun was shining and we were in high spirits. We sang:-

The Sun is losing readers
Every single day.
The Sun is losing readers
And that's how it's gonna stay.

We continued to march up and around Fleet Street singing and clapping:-

Maggie Thatcher's got one.
Rupert Murdoch is one.
La la la la. La la la la.

Someone caught sight of a scab in the Sun building: "Scab at the window". The pickets shouted "Jump! Jump!". But he took no notice. So in full voice we sang:-

How much is that scabbie in the window,
The one who is ugly and pale?
How much is that scabbie in the window?
A scabbie is always for sale.

That got rid of him! We continued and did another lap of Fleet Street with another verse ... "What shall we do with Rupert Murdoch early in the morning?" The pickets were all of the same opinion that Murdoch has a lot to answer for. He will go down before we will and he'll stay down. However long it takes we will fight to the end and we'll win.

For this picket of The Sun building and Fleet House the City cops took charge. New tactics were used to keep the road clear of large numbers of pickets. This was new to Fleet Street and many passers-by had their eyes opened. The lady cleaners were out in force and an inspiration. Their simple strategy paid off. They ignored the police and their singing was a joy. Five police horses arrived at 9.45am with more reinforcements. Of the 500 or so pickets many remained at the top of Fleet Street. The horses had one good effect - many of the scabs heading for The Sun took one look and fled.



A single Support Group has produced seven badges

Calendar

Tuesday, 6th May, 10am, lobby Sogat executive meeting at the TUC, Great Russell Street, WC1.

Wednesday, 7th May, 8.30pm, Tower Hill, march to Wapping.

Saturday, 10th May, 9pm, Tower Hill, march to Wapping.

May Day, Wapping

Thursday evening 1st May was fine. A large and high-spirited crowd gathered at Tower Hill and descended into Wapping after 9pm. The brilliant red flags of the Turkish contingents made a pretty picture, but they quickly vanished.

At Virginia St the pickets dragged away the barriers, and again at Breezers Hill. The adrenalin flowed as pickets saw there was just one line of ordinary strikebreakers between them and Pennington St, but they knew what might be waiting for them at the bottom, and hesitated. The cops were shaking, but nobody would go through first. Flying Vs had not been organised to do the business. After ten minutes a riot squad reinforced their line and the chance had been lost.

At Glamis Road, horses charged and were not able to go forward due to a solid line of pickets.

By 11.30 the remaining 2,000 pickets had converged on Virginia St. It was covered by 20 horses with riot squads behind. Pickets threw barriers around to build a defence. The Highway was cleared against strong opposition. At the height there were 40 horses with 10 behind in Virginia Street, large numbers of woodentops holding the line and snatch-squads in riot uniform diving in to make arrests. But after twenty minutes of this they had still not stopped the hail of missiles so the riot squads charged repeatedly up Wellclose Street to try and soften up the crowd. They did not feel safe to bring out the papers until 12.50, when 27 transports followed by scab cars and coaches came out of Virginia Street, turning left and then up Dock Street. By now the opposition was less concrete than verbal.

As the pickets began to disperse, the riot squads charged up to the tea vans and beyond. Cavalry charges cleared pickets. When this started, most remained and responded by stoning, fighting and kicking.

It was the most effective midweek Wapping picket so far. It has reached the stage where pickets are escalating the fight by thinking and acting for themselves. Our hatred becomes harder, quicker, better aimed. Scabs and their defenders will burn in the heat of that anger.

Saturday 3rd May, Wapping - the 100th day of the dispute

Two Saturday marches, the biggest yet, left the Embankment and Butcher Row converging on Virginia Street at 9.45pm. An attempt was made to force through the massive concentration of police and horses and get down to the main gate. Everywhere were cops, horses, pickets, clouds of smoke, barriers dragged all over the road or thrown and pushed into the police. The assault failed as horses and foot-cops charged repeatedly into the crowds between Dock Street and Artichoke Hill. They were bitterly resisted by every means; one mounted strike-breaker fell off his horse in eagerness to trample down workers. The rider became entangled in a mess of barricades. Two mounties who came to his rescue got caught together and ended up trampling the fallen rider. In the early charges anyone who fell or wasn't quick to move was snatched.

For three hours there was constant violence as riot squads, horses and ordinary cops charged the pickets again and again, to the east, west and north of Virginia Street. Pickets counter-charged using bricks, scaffolding and anything to hand. Wives of print-workers again were in the thick of the action. Eventually the situation stabilised with large crowds of pickets by Thomas More Street, Dock Street, Wellclose Square and Artichoke Hill, with the police occupying The Highway and Wellclose Street, the parks and open spaces, forming strategic lines to seal off the whole area. There were about 80 horses, 200 riot cops and hundreds of others deployed in the Virginia Street area alone. Perspex riot shields were visible everywhere.

Soon after the first assault, speeches by two lefty MPs and union high-ups had begun from a platform in the open space by Wellclose. It was an ear-splitting continuous stream

of incoherent babble. It had a significant effect in disorientating and pacifying pickets whose frustration did not go as far as pulling the plug. As the police smashed into the pickets Brenda Dean was begging her members not to lobby her and her executive colleagues. All this, and the plight of the marcher who suffered a heart attack, was used to draw attention away from the main battle and to drown out the discussions and organising needed, to respond effectively to what was happening nearby.

At 12.20am 12 artics left the plant via Pennington Street and Glamis Road. Another eight left at 1.30. At 2am three artics and 16 white vans drove in. And at 2.17 four artics and ten private scab cars left the plant by Wapping Lane. The Highway opened to traffic at 2.25.

Practical questions must be considered: are bare fists and rubble adequate weapons to the task we face? Why are the marches split up? What exactly is the role of the stewards? What kind of organisation do we need? Thursday and Saturday together were a watershed in this fight.

Notes:

- It has been said by a few that the trip to picket the Cannock depot was a bit flat. But there was plenty to do if pickets looked for it. Some did and had a very successful night - ask any TNT driver in the area that night.
- Additional Southampton scab coach companies are:-
 - Hedge End Hire, 24 Botley Road, Hedge End (tel.: Botley 6448 for the owner's private telephone, or 87863 for the yard).
 - Amigo Coaches, 16 Obelisk Road, Woolston (tel.: 0703 444929).
 - Contact Coaches, (B Brown Ltd), 24 Harbourne Gardens, West End (tel.: 0703 474907).
- Additional Southampton scab pubs are:-
 - The Fox and Hounds, Pound Street, Bitterne (tel.: 0703 449140).
 - The Hinkler, Hinkler Road (unlisted telephone).
- Some Southampton scabs: There are now scab reps inside Wapping. Bill Cruise (formerly of Foster Wheeler) and Tony Hunt (formerly Vosper shiprepairers) have been elected.
 - Five useful scab names and addresses:
 - W T Allen, 25 Cambrian Close, Bursledon Green (tel.: Bursledon 5621)
 - M E Street, 42 Gordon Avenue, Portswood (tel.: 0703 552437)
 - T R Tracey, 11 Northolt Gardens, Lordshill (tel.: 0703 737978)
 - B Moth, 493 Hinkler Road, Thornhill (tel.: 0703 441989)
 - V G Booth, 31 Bluebell Road, Bassett (tel.: 0703 760851).
- Two more scab NGAs from The Sun:-
 - Dave Blake, 48 Stonyshots, Waltham Abbey, Essex (tel.: Lea Valley 712081).
 - A E Scicluna, "Sunnymead", Tuesley Lane, Godalming, Surrey (tel.: 04868 21485).

George Dighton, Times scab, is a Tory candidate in the council election in Basildon. He lives at 4 Brookside Close, Billericay (tel.: 02774 4858).
- Four Bemrose, Liverpool scabs have been reported peddling their excuses with socialist groups.
- Two errors crept in last week:
 - Bursledon - the Southampton suburb - was spelt incorrectly.
 - The Old Ship Inn, Bridge Road (opposite Mick Scanlon's house and a convenient scab meeting place) is in Bursledon, not Swanwick.
- Why do some Sogat officials think after four months of Wapping that the police are people we can negotiate with? Why was a member of the Observer Sogat clerical chapel punched in the eye by a steward last Thursday night for suggesting the police were not on our side?
- Pickets will remember vividly a 20-year-old who was blooded by a police truncheon on Saturday, 26th April. This lad, who required several stitches to his head, is okay now and came back to picket last Thursday night.
- Income: NoW Stereo Chapel collection £56.30; local resident 20p; Times RIRMA £1, 50p; misc. £1, £4.93; Sogat RIRMA chapel £5; Telegraph Sogat Day Machine Chapel £5; Sogat clericals £1, 20p, 20p; Caxton House clericals £2.
- Happy Birthday, Betty. One of our greatest supporters, Mrs Betty Primrose, is 60 on Tuesday, 6th May. Hard-working Betty is always seen at Tower Hill and on the marches. Many happy returns.
- After three months printers and supporters are Public Enemy No. 1 and proud of it.
- Picket: c/o 628 Tottenham High Road, London N17. Picket is published by NGA/Sogat members.