

Thursday 15th May, West Horndon Flying picket

Arrived 11.30. One police car to about 120 pickets were present. Road block moved from one side of gateway to where white vans normally come out. We were stopping scab drivers' cars and trying to talk to them. One car drove off with one picket on the bonnet for about 15 yards. The car was chased by pickets but he got away into their yard round the back of the estate. The picket was shaken but not badly hurt. Within ten minutes there were 19 police vehicles, including approx. 10-12 transits packed with police. There was a big hokey-cokey to clear the road and we were pushed back to the bus stop (1.00). Now there were two ranks of police in front of us and they brought out two big lorries and fifteen white mice.

Some scab cars had windows broken and we decided to all go away and come back again at 3.00. We lost ourselves till 3.00 and when we came back (about 70 of us), we caught the police out (only 30 of them) on the entrance. They tried to pen us in and we kept walking up and down the road. About 3.30 a scab lorry came in with a police escort and his side window was smashed and about 10 bricks went in the window.

Once we had got a large number of police back again we decided to call it a day. We caused a lot of hassle to the police and their reason why there was so many police the first time (11.30) was that they said there had been a murder in Brentwood, 3 miles away!

Monday 19th May, Gray's Inn Road; Fleet Street; Central Hall, Westminster

The day started with an early picket of the former Times building from 7.30am. About 300 pickets had arrived opposite the main entrance by 9.15 when there was a spontaneous surge across the road. The entrance was blocked for a good five minutes until local police reinforcements arrived. The police inspector was furious with the crowd and asked for better behaviour on the march to Fleet Street. The police know as much as the pickets - the march was supposedly a secret.

At 10am the pickets gathered behind the building, on Gough Street, and marched off behind the "sacked 6,000" banner. The marchers sang and shouted all the way past the Mirror building and down to the Standard. The van drivers here gave the march a great reception. Then it was on to Fleet Street with shouts of "Come and join us!". And again there was a lot of support from the Telegraph (where pickets shouted out "You're next") and from the pickets at the Sun building on Bouverie Street. The march terminated at Temple. Here on the Embankment a couple of scab shuttle coaches were surprised and quickly moved off. The scabs at the rendezvous point would have to put up with a long wait.

Then people made their own way to Sogat's noon meeting at the Central Hall, Westminster organised by the London District Council attended by well over 3,000 members. Brenda Dean was given a uniformly hostile reception and angered the meeting with all her talk on the peripheral issues of the offer on Gray's Inn Road and the hardship fund. This was not what the members wished to hear. Jobs and Wapping are still the issues and these were side-stepped. She was roundly criticised by speaker after speaker from the floor for purging the High Court contempt and her low-key handling of the strike. The issues were wide-ranging - from the paralysis of the TUC through to the distribution and the boycott campaign. And the failure to involve Sogat nationally was again a contentious issue. One question from the floor summed up the feelings of many: "Whose side are you on?" and when she was called "a film star" there were roars of applause. At 2.40pm Ms Dean had had enough and announced she was off to another meeting. There was almost a riot. She was jeered and given a slow hand clap and many left the meeting in disgust. National officers followed her out. Group Secretary Chris Robbins offered to reconvene the meeting. A vote was taken on escalating the picketing, boycott campaign and demonstrations and this was carried.

Wednesday 21st May Wapping

At 9.15pm 600 printworkers marched from Tower Hill with three banners from Warehouse and Publishing chapels to the top of Virginia Street. Two lines of police blocked The Highway. Instead of coming to a halt the march reversed and headed up Ensign Street hoping to reach the Wapping Lane exit. Half way up the street another line of police blocked the route. The march remained here for ten minutes and the police regrouped behind, blocking Leman Street and Cable Street. Then the police in front of the march moved back and the pickets were able to continue up and circle left, back to Virginia Street where the road was again blocked by police. At 10.10pm the march arrived back in front of the plant. Two artics stormed down the ramp, up Virginia Street and turned right

into The Highway fifteen feet away from the pickets. It was announced that these would be the last articles to leave by way of Virginia Street. Pickets are opposed to deals with the police. At 10.30pm another impromptu march began to Thomas More Street and back. At 10.50, with The Highway supposedly blocked to traffic, a single car drove straight towards the crowd. The driver eventually stopped but tried to inch through the pickets. No one yielded their ground and the car reversed. Someone could have been killed.

At 11.50 The Highway was opened to traffic. Almost immediately another convoy left the plant by way of Wapping Lane. There were no arrests.

Thursday 22nd May, Wapping

About 70 pickets, mainly RIRMA, turned up from Ham and were quite vocal, with the ladies in fine voice. The six official pickets on the main gate (mainly NGA) could be heard all the way to The Highway, especially when the reel lorries and armoured coaches passed by. These early pickets catch a lot of scab journalists. And they always look distinctly uncomfortable and shifty as they cross their former colleagues' picket lines.

Letter from a striker (Times Sogat RIRMA)

People should think more of individual circumstances. In the past 16 weeks I have had just one day's casual working (earning £42) and last week collected £30 from the levy. The money I am getting is simply inadequate to enable me to pay the fares to picket regularly. It costs me £4.50 to get to Wapping and my last train home leaves at 12.10am.

Notes:

- Brian Hughes has been sent to prison for two weeks arising out of an incident at a Wapping demo in early May.
- Wednesday 28th May, 8.30pm, march from Tower Hill to Wapping.
- Friday 30th May, 7-11pm, unemployed night at Wapping, organised by the Federation of Claimants Unions.
- Saturday 31st May, 8.30pm, march from Tower Hill to Wapping.
- The EETPU in Eastleigh (three miles from Southampton) is still actively recruiting for Wapping.

The Aliens have Landed: A 1986 Horror Story (3rd May 1986)

Twenty years ago, when my children were small, I would watch their fascinated faces on Saturday evening as they, in turn, watched Doctor Who do battle with the evil Aliens, whose cry of "ORDERS MUST BE OBEYED WITHOUT QUESTION AT ALL TIMES" and "EXTERMINATE!" could strike terror from behind the glass screen. They were the Bad Guys, and Doctor Who and his accomplices, the Good Guys, would always triumph over evil in the end.

That was a long time ago, and Doctor Who is no more, but on Saturday night in the East End of London, outside the Police Station in Leman Street, beneath the unlit Blue Lamp, I witnessed a sight which made my stomach lurch in that old familiar way. In the road, between their space ships, cleverly made to look like police coaches, the Aliens, about twenty of them, were shedding their human disguise of neat blue suits with silver buttons and identifying numbers on the shoulders and climbing into their hunting outfits of plain dark-coloured overalls with steel-capped boots, helmet and dark visor. And as they prepared for their evening sport, laughing and joking, I swear I could hear the old cry - "Exterminate" ... "Orders Will Be Obeyed Without Question At All Times" - from these faceless monsters.

In those far-off days, when we switched off the television set and turned our minds to other things - having tea, tucking the children into bed in their cosy rooms following laughter and games in the bath, the Aliens were banished and totally forgotten. Why then, on a sunny morning, in the safety of my own home, miles away from that dark London street, do I still have that feeling of terror? Could it be that there is an enclave of these Beings in every High Street in the country? Have they been here long enough to take over? We are constantly told by our Leaders, in the Press and on television and radio, that these are the Good Guys. They can do no wrong. And it is us, who are the Bad Guys, who must be Exterminated by these Aliens, whose Orders Must Be Obeyed Without Question At All Times.

Notes on the Miners Strike

The grass roots in the mining industry will readily admit that they went into the strike unprepared and not expecting the government, police and judiciary to direct all the forces of hell against them. They will also tell that they came to realise that the key to the success of the strike was not realised until too late. Among the things realised in hindsight were that it was important to occupy the high ground first (important targets and tactical areas before the forces are brought into full action) also that contrary to what the leadership often said they realised that the greatest force they had was the pickets themselves.

We went to picket pits in Staffordshire and had a good deal of success in stopping the labour forces on most occasions but found that on returning home that our efforts were wasted as the scabs reformed and walked in through open gates. This could have been prevented by setting up picket committees before we left and organising the loyal strikers as we very effectively did at Coventry colliery.

Income: £4.25 NGA strikers; 16p, 10p misc; £1 Times Graphical Chapel; 50p Sun Chapel; £1 casual striker; £10 S Telegraph Readers and Composing Chapel; £3 ST Foundry; £2 "A&P"; £2.70 striking NGA; £3 Sogat RIRMA; £5, £1, £2 Times RIRMA; £5 Wapping resident; £58 Now Publishing Chapel; £10 NGA machine minder.

Picket is published by Sogat/NGA pickets.

Mail has not been arriving at our old address in N17.

Concise first-hand reports welcome. Also donations, however small.