

MANNING THE BATTERING RAM

In May 1972, in London, five stevedores were jailed in Pentonville Prison for picketing the docks, and immediately half the big unions in England were on strike in sympathy, and before long there was so much bad feeling that the Trade Union Congress (T.U.C.) ordered a march through London to Pentonville (in the East End) to demand the release of the dockers, and to have the march go via Fleet Street, to encourage all the printers there to go on strike so there'd be no newspapers except "leftwing broadsheets." I was on strike myself and Robin, the guy I was living with, was currently involved with some communists, so we all headed for Speakers Corner, where the march was to begin.

By noon there were about half a million people with banners and placards and flyers and newspapers and beer, and the T.U.C. marching band tuned up and pretty soon, after a few little speeches, the band led off down Oxford Street.

I carried a placard which said, "BRITISH TROOPS OUT OF IRELAND" and held it over my face so no cameras could get a shot of me; then Robin suggested that he and I go up about a mile ahead of the march, on the route, and try to sell some copies of The Worker, a leftist newspaper. Which sounded all right.

We did good business. We'd go up to cleaning ladies and loiterers and tourists and say, "Copy of The Worker?" "What is it?" "It explains the noise you're hearing off in the distance." Then we sold out and returned to the march and Dave, the communist, gave us more copies and sent us up ahead again.

When we reached Fleet Street, all the printers were standing on the sidewalks and entrances to the printing works. "'Ere, mate, for 3p (10¢), a copy of The Worker. Read why you should go on strike." "How much would it cost with a little kiss thrown in?" said one of the blokes. "4p," I replied. So pretty soon, after I'd been slobbered over by every printer in town, I'd sold all my Workers and half of Robin's too.

"Let's go straight on to Clerkenwell Green where the speeches will be, and wait for everyone there," Robin said. "And you owe me 85p for those Workers of mine you sold." "I owe you nothing," I replied. "I'll give Dave the money. He thinks I'm a halfwit because I'm not a raving red. I'll show him I can sell his poxy newspaper anyway." I glanced at Robin quickly, saw his blood vessels bulging, and knew we were in for a scene.

As the marchers started arriving at Clerkenwell Green, drunk and rowdy, Robin hissed, "Dave will charge me 85p." "No, he won't because I'll tell him otherwise." "It's my responsibility. What if you lose that money?"

The designated speechmakers were now trying out their bullhorns and others were cheering, laughing, waving and drinking.

COMRADS! COMRADS, EVERYONE, PEOPLE ... COMRADS, WE'RE GONNA HEAD STRAIGHT TO PENTONVILLE PRISON AS SOON AS WE'VE FINISHED HERE AND WE'RE GONNA BREAK DOWN THE GATE WITH A BATTERING RAM ... YES WE HAVE A BATTERING RAM IN A TRUCK NEAR HERE AND WE'RE GONNA START THE REVOLUTION RIGHT NOW ... YEAH ... you're dealing with party funds, you scab. You have no political awareness ... you're petty bourgeois ... SAVE ENGLAND FROM THE TORIES ... LONG LIVE IRELAND ... RUSSIA WE NEED YOU ... QUIET EVERYBODY HERE'S JIM CRANKCASE FROM THE MINERS UNION AND HE'S GONNA EXPLAIN WHY WALES WANTS THE REVOLUTION AND THE FREEDOM OF THE DOCKERS ... listen I'll take my 85p if I have to break your arm ... your 85p? That's a joke. I didn't see you kissing anyone ... right, and just wait till I tell Dave you virtually prostituted yourself, for one pee! ... what could I buy with one pee? ... LIBERATION, BROTHERS AND SISTERS AND COMRADS AND ALL RACES. WE WILL KNOW JUSTICE IN OUR OWN TIME ... WEST HAM RULE WEST HAM RULE ... SPURS RULE ... YES IT WILL BE CHEAPER TO GO TO FOOTBALL MATCHES ... I'm going home and I'm gonna throw you out, you whore! ... GREAT NEWS, COMRADS: THE PRINTERS HAVE JOINED THE STRIKE! ... not if I have any say in the matter ... FORWARD WITH THE BATTERING RAM ... NO PUSHING ... LONG LIVE THE PROLETARIAT ... A WARM THANK YOU FOR THE BAND

Robin and I took off in opposite directions, fighting our ways through fanatics and pickpockets and ruffians. I caught a bus going in the correct direction, but had to change to another bus, which I just missed, and Robin was standing on the platform scowling at me.

He got home before me and when I arrived there was my tablecloth spread in the front yard with all my clothes in the middle of it, and a cold stewy cup of tea and dry toast, with a note that said, "Thanks to you I missed the revolution."

PICKET LINE

We were all picketing and discussing filing for union strike benefits for our dependents with the union local boss. One woman had a dog with her and asked if he