

Picket no. 43 5th January 1987

Sunday Night/Monday Morning, 3.00am. Wapping: Over 100 pickets walked from Welleclose to the gates of the scab fortress, to be met by 40 truncheon-wielding scabs in blue. Without warning, they started to lay into us. Fighting broke out and several pickets of both sexes were injured, to add to the casualty list from Saturday. Strategic retreat and off home for paper-round leaving barriers in Pennington.

3.00am: God knows what happened to the others coming from Wapping Lane! Anyway, there was one cop van at each end of Virginia, and they immediately piled out, truncheons drawn. About 15 of us got through; the rest retreated, so we couldn't do much. About 20 of us went to Wapping Lane, and crowd-control barriers became scab-van barriers suddenly across Pennington Street. We had to disappear sharpish when a load of filth came up. So we moved about the area a bit. Ranks swelled as we moved back to the Highway. Picked up police escort as white mice scabs came out. Returned to base, frustrated for the moment.

Wednesday 28th January, 9.00am. TUC buildings: Around 50 pickets gathered to tell the TUC what they think of their crying condemnation of pickets. Pickets stayed outside all morning. Only the NUM President distanced himself by refusing to agree with the forelock-tugging of the Executive. We are entitled to fight for our jobs. Meanwhile, Willis crawls around the back of the building for his job. Do we have to be bludgeoned to death before this lot even issues a toothless protest? (*Out of the Mouths of Babes...* One junior picket at the TUC, when asked who the lady with the fancy hair-do was, replied loudly "Maggie Thatcher"... Exit one embarrassed Sogat general secretary.)

Wednesday Evening. Wapping: A march of 800-1,000 pickets, all in good spirits, shows that they can throw all the power of the riot police, the horses and the rest, but they cannot beat our spirit to fight on. The Highway cleared at around 11.00pm, when we decided to give Old Bill further practice at pushing us around and wander off to continue picketing.

Friday 30th January, 9.00am. Embankment Tube: Thirty scabs were asked to change their pick-up point pending further negotiations.

Friday Night. Wapping: On a freezing night, some 30 or 40 pickets braved the cold to annoy Plod and the scabs. Pickets noticed telephone cables being installed at 2.00 in the morning. When challenged, they claimed to be "working" for Mercury and have nothing to do with the strike of Telecom engineers. Seems we've heard that one before. After the intervention of pickets, these shady individuals legged it. Pickets walked round to a nearby Telephone Exchange (all Telecom engineers were wearing Wapping badges) and informed them of developments in the Highway.

Saturday afternoon, 31st January: Got to Pennington St at 5.20pm, about 100 of us. Barriers moved across the road and some got from Wapping Lane, but cops arrived in numbers. We split up and had a walkabout, with several successful conversations with scabs. At the same time, a load of pickets had turned up at Virginia to take the gate, but there were just too many vanloads of strikebreakers in uniform. While blocked from getting to the gate, a load of scabs arriving in cars were also inconvenienced - they had to reverse hurriedly in the face of roadblocks on one side and a hail of truth on the other.

Saturday Night 31st January: 1,500-2,000 answered the call, with many more finding temporary places to keep warm for a bit. A nurses' banner was at the front of the march, the 140th strikers' march to Wapping Scabworks. At times it appeared (especially as they left in one bus after another) as if there may have been as many police strikebreakers as pickets. As speeches got into full swing, cold horses in Virginia and the Highway were led away. Two vipers were coiled round cameras on top of newly-erected scaffolding inside the scab perimeter. As police cleared the Highway shortly after 11.00pm, one speaker was complaining that this violated the Agreement. At any rate, there were two arrests as the Highway was cleared. One prisoner was promptly rescued by quick-acting pickets. A solid mass of pickets came together at the foot of Welleclose prepared for whatever might develop, but it was relatively quiet and very solid.

Opinion Piece: Further notes on Saturday 24th January. That we could have stopped the scab citadel is without question. If the march had split up into different routes, one going to Tower Hill, another along Commercial Road via Aldgate, perhaps others coming down Cannon St Road, the going would have got a lot tougher for the scabs. It all goes to prove that the Organisers of the March had not the slightest intention of stopping the Scab Citadel.

The letter in last week's *Picket* from the Oxford Supporters Group makes very good sense. As they point out, it is better to picket nearby than to put untold fundraising efforts into getting a coach to Wapping every week. The Glasgow Supporters Group has also organised pickets at Kinning Park. There is no shortage of places to picket. If in doubt, picket the Newsagents - the Women in Armthorpe did precisely that. It also makes sense for all Chapels, whether in dispute or not, to organise a regular picket from their Chapel. When a few activists finish work in the mornings, go out and find the scabs; throw Murdoch filth all over the road where it belongs, in the gutter. Every one we get is one less for him and one up to us. Even if you are in a small chapel, it is quite amazing what two people can get up to when they put their minds to it.

Please let us know the success (or failure) of your pickets, and we can publish these. It helps the strikers to know what other things are happening and that it's not going all Murdoch's way. Also, if there are good things, we can all learn from them. We are in new territory, and we have to learn. All new things are difficult, and it is only by trying that we will beat Murdoch.



Release Shirfield and Hicks



Saturday January 24th. Wapping: Fighting back was what happened on Saturday 24th January. Fighting back against a leadership that organised a pop band to divert the anger of 20,000 people away from the scabs who have spent a year doing our jobs and were behind the barbed wire laughing at us just the same as they have been all year. A truck getting turned over was part of that fighting back. Setting fire to that truck was part of that fighting back. Trying to repel the mounted and baton-wielding police was part of the fighting back. If you must waste your time sitting around a table inquiring into the events of that night any further, first inquire in your own mind – who organised a pop band to divert the attention of the biggest ever crowd of people yet, to demonstrate in support of the sacked printworkers? FIGHT BACK!

Saturday January 24th. Wapping: Another day that shall live in the annals of police infamy. It was all there: blind hatred, brutality, squalid treatment of the weak, and – above all – the clear expression by any vile means possible of their obsequious devotion to upholding Thatcher's Law. And, at the epicentre, the grand orchestrator "Wynge" Jones, the Met's arch policeman and would-be gauleiter of Tower Hamlets. But let us first consider the earlier part of the day, which had commenced with the first gathering of our supporters around Arundel Street. Cold but relatively kind weather undoubtedly tipped the balance as far as massive attendance was concerned. Despite all the provocations of the past twelve months or so, our organisers still tried hard to liaise with the filth (God knows why), although perhaps we should be mildly pleased with the City Police superintendent who exclaimed: "What a pity I've got to hand over control to those Met animals, just down the road." We know how you feel, kind sir. But evidence of forked tongue in the past made us doubtful of his sincerity. Bang on time, the procession moved off, happy and clearly enjoying a reasonable rapport with the apparently approving members of the public, who took leaflets and mostly wished us well. An early BBC news bulletin, doubtless guided by the thoughts of Chairthing Tebbit, gleefully reported that "2,400 demonstrators are marching on Wapping..." The TV news hastily corrected the total to a police estimate of 11,000. Better, but reported elsewhere as up to 24,000 – altogether a far more reliable total.

Meanwhile *Picket's* observers moved on ahead of the gathering and decided it was time to get a sneak preview of what was awaiting the good and faithful, as they marched unsuspectingly towards the jaws of the Met's counter-demonstration which had been assembling from around 11.00am. The VHF radio crackled with position reports, and the moving up of various police units and riot/tactical support groups began to gather pace. Our forward observer counted at least four large horseboxes moving into Wapping Lane, whilst more mounted scum rode there direct. A voice from Z Division (South London area) complained bitterly that his guv'nor was moaning about serious depletion of officers from stations at Brixton, Streatham, Norbury and parts of the Croydon area. Reports were circulating that Brixton nick was under siege, but a recce to confirm this rumour failed to see any sign of it, although apparently there had been some sort of demo about the acquittal of the pig who shot the defenceless Brixton lady in her home without mercy.

By about 8.00pm, it was becoming clear that we were in for a re-run of the police riots of May 3rd, whilst the bureaucrats droned on and on from the dais – turning up the microphones to drown out the anguished cries of the real fighting people. It was sickening to see one Union speaker after another finish yakking, then scuttle to his/her car and race away to the safety of anywhere bar Wapping.

At the foot of Ensign Street, the London Ambulance Service bravely held station, despite the repeated and totally inhuman baton charges along the Highway at that point, on foot and horseback. Wellclose was repeatedly raided, as was Swedenborg Gardens – often in full police knowledge that many women and young children had taken refuge there. Still the silly bastards on the stage droned on, adding to the confusion and doing sweet f. all to improve matters.

Even more unreal was the animated argument that was going on among the bureaucracy as to who was responsible for turning the band's lorry over, and even more curious who was going to pay for the damage. All this, and people all around them were quite literally fighting to stay in one piece... "Doesn't anyone care about the suffering?" came the cry from one woman demonstrator towards where "Wynge" cowered in the relative safety of the apartment gateway. "You should be at home feeding your cat," smirked a high-ranking pig. "You shithouses won't do a thing about the TNT scab who killed last week, yet you warn us about the likelihood of pickets causing death," she retorted. At once, two blue boiler suits moved in to lift her, and a scummage ensued in which they were disarmed and were forced to retreat for new sticks to be issued. Success!

Back at Ensign Street, the ambulances held on, but by now the casualties were coming thick and fast. An ambulance service brasshat yelled abuse at a laughing police inspector, exhorting him to draw a line as one of his vehicles had been hit by pigsticks. It was a short conversation indeed, as a retreating crowd being forced nastily backwards towards the ambulance position bowled the inspector over. Next thing this moron knew, he was being lifted towards the rescue area he had seconds before refused to defend, to cries of "Let the bastard bleed to death!" How appropriate a sentiment, one thinks.

Further down Glamis Road, the residents' march was trying its level best to proceed along its own streets, only to be confronted by a phalanx of riot squad. With little warning, in they steamed, and we saw the left-hand side of the procession give way under the strain – trapping several women, some of them elderly. Protestations by the group leaders resulted in summary arrests, although some were just taken round the corner and released. As the confusion mounted, some of the marchers were separated from the main body and found themselves inside the police cordon. Reports of some demonstrators being forced into a police caravan, to be examined by a police doctor, were confirmed, and at least two people being detained in this way talked of repeatedly being told that they were "confused" when they were perfectly all right. Bring on the thought-police!

Picket's observations continued, through until about the last visible police charge at about 2.30am, Sunday. Banners were ripped down by police, and a general scene of mayhem was visited upon section after section of the crowd, as we watched from a seventh-floor vantage point. Camera and recording crews were attacked and generally harassed away from the middle of the action, and we hear that one TV personality is preparing to act against the police for treatment received (only doing their job?)

But the real cause of it all, Murdoch's production and distribution, continued totally unhindered, certainly making more than a few pickets go away thinking that they should have a rethink of strategy.

Income: £5.10 Wednesday night pickets; £7.57 Sogat *Sun* Publishing strikers; £5.00 *Evening Standard* worker; £20 KLEP FIGHTING! Anon, Edinburgh; £10.00 NGA member; £1.50 favourite picket; £2.00 Chris and Ian; £18.69 Saturday night collection; £12.78 NGA strikers.

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