

Letter from a General Trade Printer (shortened)

We have produced the three stickers which have been attacked as National Front. We are NGA/Sogat members in the General Trade who are trying to help. And we are not National Front members or sympathisers. At the time we printed the stickers the Americans were getting such a bad Press over Libya so we decided to play along that line. We also took the idea of the British thing from the "Murdoch is Bad News" leaflet. It should be understood that we have put our jobs on the line by producing these stickers.

Picket note: The point here is not which party did the stickers. Playing the chauvinist card is playing into the enemy's hands. A boss is a boss is a boss. A cop is a cop is a cop. All over the world workers and bosses face each other across the class divide. And what is happening now in Fleet Street is more similar than it is different from what took place in the industry in France, Germany and the US in the Seventies. Like it or not, what we are fighting is an international class war.

Notes:

- Pickets at Bemrose, Liverpool report that one worker has joined the picket line.
- Rotten deal at the Irish Times - printers who have refused to handle News International copy have now been saddled with a deal to let the Editor do it.
- Scouts report a new exit from the Wapping plant at the south-west corner facing New Road.

Calendar:

Picket Wapping - 24 hours a day, seven days a week. And don't forget Gray's Inn Road and Bouverie Street.
Saturday 14th June, 8.30pm Tower Hill, march to Wapping.
Wednesday 18th June, 8.30pm Tower Hill, march to Wapping.

Income: £2 NGA striker; £5 Sun Night Machine chapel tea wagon; £1 Sun lady cleaner; £3 Sun/NoW Phototec; 30p misc; £1 ST Natsopa; £5 misc; 50p Warehouse casual; £1 NUPE member; £1, 50p Wapping residents; £5 Daily Mail Reading and Composing (Sogat); £1 Times chapel; £2 Times Machine chapel; 20p social worker; £1 Standard comp; 50p Sun Machine; £1 Sogat machine; £1 Birmingham Printworkers Support Group; £1 working Nalگو; 40p NoW Publishing; £5 red minder; £20 NoW NGA Composing chapel; £140.46 Sun Publishing chapel; £15 Hooligan Press; £10 Times Editorial Assistants; £5 Southampton supporter; 50p picket.

Concise written contributions welcome.

Picket is published by NGA/Sogat pickets.

Picket no.16

Thursday, 12th June 1986

Saturday 7th June, York Hall meeting and march to Wapping

A striker chaired the noon meeting of 1,500 and allowed everyone the opportunity to express their opinions and ideas. The ballot results were applauded and seen as a "no" to more bullying in Fleet Street, "no" to the police and "no" to Kinnoch and the TUC. Regular chapel meetings were encouraged for all strikers in order to acquire and debate information. A proposition to escalate the strike was carried.

The meeting closed at 2.35pm and the printworkers marched behind AEU and Sogat Casual Machine banners to Wapping. The route took the marchers through Sidney Street and by Cable Street. The truth and irony were not lost. Churchill used the police during the 1911 Siege of Sidney Street and many supposed anarchists were cornered and killed. Between the wars the British Union of Fascists turned their attention to East London and in 1936 they planned to march through the area as a display of their strength. Opposition was supported by thousands of East Londoners and the result was the Battle of Cable Street. The Blackshirts were prevented from marching through East London. The Public Order Act was one of the results of this confrontation.

The local residents were very supportive as the printers marched by on Saturday. When the marchers arrived at the plant at 3.30 The Highway was successfully blocked for half an hour.

Support

John Breen Mac O'Connell Charlie Miller John Ward

They are in court on Monday, 16th June, prosecuted by the NPA over their involvement in the strike over Warrington. They are being sued in two separate actions by Mirror Group titles for losses incurred over the course of the Warrington stoppage. Get down there and show them your support. And bring the banners.

10am. Monday, 16th June. Picket the Law Courts, Strand, WC2

Saturday 7th June, Wapping - march and rally

At 9.15 about 3,000 printworkers and supporters formed the regular Saturday march from Tower Hill to Wapping. The Highway just east of Artichoke Hill was blocked by police when the main body of marchers passed the main entrance of the plant at 9.45. Another march began along Cable Street and east to Cannon Street Road. Here there was one of the large groups of police with ten horses backing them up. The march diverted north and a splinter group of 200 ended up on Commercial Road moving towards the Butcher Row intersection in order to spread out and be alert for scabs. A call over the radio led to 130 pickets going off to Glamis Road. Two minutes later an escorted scab truck and coach travelled west up Commercial Road (suffering slight damage). The remaining 70 then went down Butcher Row to The Highway and again lined up. More scabs/cops received insults. At 11.15 the police cleared The Highway to the east of Glamis Road and another convoy of two artics and 21 scab cars left by this exit. There were two arrests at this time.

Returning to the main road the pickets had a lively reunion with 250 Stereo strikers and others. There was dancing and singing in the street and continuous criss-crossing and U-turns outwitting the cops trying to spoil all the fun. This was great! The pickets weaved round the streets, waving to friendly locals and yet alert for scabs. King David Street was blocked so some set off to a zebra crossing on Commercial Road. Another scab convoy left the plant at 11.50 by this eastern route. Pickets at Glamis Road were now outnumbered by the police. As the pickets dispersed in Cannon Street Road there was an arrest and 50 pickets jumped in to rescue him. The police looked dead scared and barely managed to get him away and protect themselves and their vans despite 40 reinforcements. A hundred and fifty pickets chanted "scum" at these robots, then dispersed.

At 12.15am the police roadblock at the top of Artichoke Hill moved off and an attempt was made to clear The Highway opposite the main entrance at 12.50. The pickets moved off from the shelter of Wellclose Square and repeatedly grouped and regrouped leading the frustrated police all over the place. Two hundred pickets and one enterprising steward

blocked the road for another hour. This was most satisfying.

At 1.15 80 dogged pickets moved down The Highway to Wellclose and helped block the road. There was a bit of an argy-bargy and everyone marched back up towards Wapping Lane. Cannon Street Road was blocked en route and The Highway sealed for ten minutes. Then the amused group sauntered back to base.

This night saw people confident, even smug and full of initiative and mobility. Spontaneous decisions were the order of the day. There is enormous potential here for the pickets to develop both their picketing and strike strategy themselves.

Monday 9th June, Sogat's Biennial Delegate Conference, Scarborough

The Sun trip to Scarborough was a great success. The journey through the night was long and tiring but was highlighted by non-stop playing of Vera Lynn tapes and various stars of the Forties - alright for those who like "Spot that Tune". Brenda was greeted by Mr Sheldrake who suggested he take out an equity card for his brilliant acting. An ITN cameraman looking through his viewfinder wondered why he saw only darkness. A picket had blotted it out with a "Don't Buy The Sun" sticker. "Don't Buy The Sun" was brilliantly depicted in the Scarborough sand by Mr Oddwell with his newly-acquired spade. Having a Fish and Chip meal four members had their meal spoiled by the lady proprietor who had owned five newsagents shops in the past and blamed printworkers for her downfall. A barman in the Spa bar was in the mood for antagonising pickets by insisting on portraying his copy of The Sun behind the bar.

P.S. Hope the coach driver passes his test this next Thursday.

Tuesday 10th June, Wapping - early-morning picket

We had a good morning in all. Around 300 pickets gathered at Wapping. Think what we could do with 3,000. Looking around there were the same old faces. As usual the scabs were crossing the line. A scab Editor came along and stopped to admire us, but he left pretty sharply, with the crowd of pickets booing. It was raining heavily and the wind was strong. It was miserable weather. The boys in blue seemed on edge. No wonder, the Sun lady cleaners were about! The four musketeers in skirts went to a scab pick-up point at Tower Hill to try and persuade the scabs not to get on their coach. All was quiet - until the coach pulled in and the doors opened. The four musketeers (in skirts) ran for the coach. On beating everyone else they blocked the entrance. The pickets asked the scabs: "Are you getting on that coach?" and they cautiously replied "Yes". "Oh no you're not!" All hell broke loose. The driver's mate tried in vain to pull the scabs on the coach one by one. He knew he had a fight on his hands. The scabs already on the coach could only watch as their colleagues lost their jackets, shirts and shoes. A scab threw a pint of milk over one of the musketeers in a desperate attempt to get her off a scab she had pinned to the floor. He ended up regretting this. He was struck over the head with an umbrella. Another scab left his teeth impressions on one of the musketeer's knuckles. The driver, panic-stricken and pale, radioed for help and the musketeers made a hasty retreat. Until the next time!

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The pickets assembled in front of the scab plant to attempt to install backbone into scab Sun journalists who had been reported to vote to leave Wapping 94-80. Since the beginning of the strike 138 days ago 100 NUJ members (not all reporters) have left Wapping for one reason or another leaving five to six hundred scabbing on the four titles. Eric Butler, one of 30 NUJ who who have been on strike from the beginning, demonstratively led a small delegation of NUJ strikers down to the main gate. Meanwhile the pickets were spreading out.

About 20 went east along The Highway and

returned west along Pennington Street towards the scab plant until moved on. In Pennington there were busloads of police strikebreakers in waiting. They were there to prevent another attempt on the main gate. There have been two successful attempts recently. About 15 other pickets had been across the street in front of the iron railings outside the plant until a walking scab complained to his mates. Immediately the scabs in blue jumped to attention and moved the pickets on. Also at this picket was an ex-TNT driver from north of the gap. He pickets regularly.



Wednesday 11th June, Wapping - afternoon picket

It began as a quiet afternoon behind the barriers opposite the plant. Most pickets had left to lobby the 1pm meeting of the Sun journalists at a nearby hall. Two sacked Times journalists were on the main gate handing out literature and verbal to their scab colleagues. And two Italian cameramen were taking photographs and notes from the ladies present. It was actually sunny for a whole hour, and what a difference that made! The western perimeter of the plant is being strengthened with new railings and razor wire. A fork-lift truck and twelve workmen were kept busy. Murdoch must be expecting an invasion from the Tower Hotel. Pickets were laughing and joking about Douglas Hurd's latest pronouncement on the picketing - such an inconvenience to our poor police force. Four pickets were down from Birmingham for the day. One had been in court - the case adjourned for a second time. They looked very smart in their suits and sober dresses, and it was good to see them on another visit. At 3pm news came through of the Sun journalists' decision to continue to work at Wapping and to accept their 10% pay offer and a new swimming pool and gymnasium. The vote was 136-6. Murdoch entered the plant at 3.10 with a big, fat grin on his face.

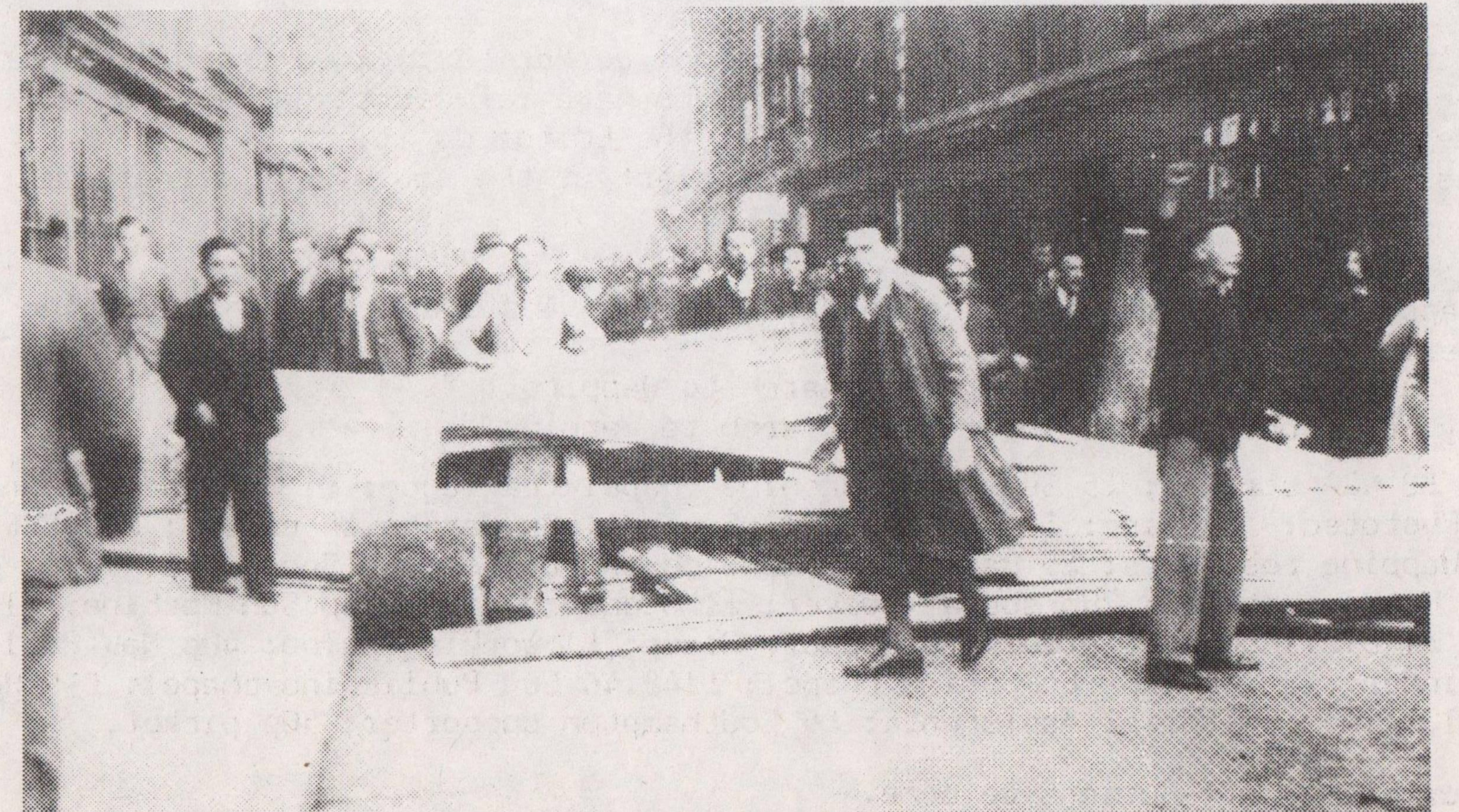
Wednesday 11th June, Wapping - march and rally

At 9.10pm 600 marched from Tower Hill behind band and banners on one of the few evenings this year when the weather has been kind. The march was halted at the top of Virginia Street with the usual lines of police blocking The Highway. Ten police horses blocked Virginia Street and there were reinforcements in evidence. The pickets were loud and made their disapproval known whenever anything moved within the scab plant. At 10.30 the police started pushing and shoving and eventually cleared The Highway. A small group of pickets managed to get to Glamis Road and delay an artic. The evening was fairly quiet - but was another of the ongoing excellent Wednesday night marches.

Overheard on the picket line: A sacked printer brought his 11-year-old son along for this march and rally. At 10.30pm the father had had enough of shouting "scab", but the boy was still very vocal. "Let's go home now and watch the World Cup" said dad. "No" said the boy: "This is more important. Forget the football. This is your living".

Friends and Enemies

Pickets have no use for the world of the empty resolution. This is the world of the rotten compromise. On the picket line you are either on one side or the other. It is simple. Pickets have no time for cowardly filth like Dean/Kinnock/Willis and company. It is all very sound to demand that the "leaders" support the ranks but these leaders will never rest until the pickets surrender. That has been proved time and time again. The real leaders are the regular pickets who have stood up to the strikebreakers. The pickets are our friends, and we, as pickets, have not one ounce of trust in anyone who cavorts with the traitors.



Barricade erected in Cable Street during the anti-fascist riots, 1936. John Walker.