

Something Should Be Done **by** **Peter Good**

I write this by way of explanation of my whereabouts over the past two years. In some ways it constitutes an apology for I knew beforehand what the outcome was likely to be, and perhaps I could have used my energy to more honest endeavours. However, what follows is somewhat trimmed and glossed over as I have not wished to delve into personalities (which range from the heroic to the well poisoner) and because it would require of the reader detailed knowledge of employment legislation.

December 1976 had everything going for me. I had a plum job working with people with learning disabilities on a successful venture adapting 'work' to them rather than the other way around. With my first wife and our two kids we had a house (tied to the job alas), an old car, and just enough money to keep us content from week to week. In addition I was the senior moderator on *Anarchism Lancastrium*, an organ that fluttered around the more lunatic fringe of the movement but whose glossy production methods and sinister financial backing became the envy of the anarchist press houses.

That fateful night in December saw me in attendance at the Annual General Meeting of the hospital branch of COHSE (Confederation of Health Service Employees). Up to then I had been 'an active branch member'; I'd turn up to odd meetings and maybe argue the odds with someone over a pint or two. That night some silly bugger whom I hardly knew proposed me as Branch Chairman, was seconded from the floor and I accepted all within the space of thirty seconds. With hindsight I should have stood up and declared my politics or declined or even accepted and gone with the flow and gotten rich from the pickings. But I did none of these. I took the job on.

Calderstones is similar to most giant Victorian mental hospitals. Built of brick, huge three storey blocks, landscaped gardens, tucked away from sight in the depths of Lancashire's very fine countryside. Up until ten years ago it ran very much like other hospitals. Highly institutionalised staff and patients, drab dormitory wards, meal time slops and labour on the hospital farm. Then the inevitable scandal of the mid sixties, a massive injection of cash and 'new ideas'. Wards were split up, decorated, refurnished, personalised. Patients were scrubbed clean, dressed in real clothes and put to work in new Industrial Therapy Centres. And the staff were taken in by

new career structures whereby the 'best' nurses were promoted to office desks and the ancillary staff were work studied and reorganised and the hospital itself became part of the Burnley Health District which in turn paid homage to the Lancashire Area Health Authority which fell within the North West Regional Health Authority. And as each tier of authority grew came a desk, a filing cabinet, an office, a secretary. And with them came the new whizz kids of Britain's fastest growing industry - Personnel Officers, Administrators, Work Study Officers. With such a variety of new found positions power became the name of the game.

As each tier of authority grew it quickly became indispensable. It had to be referred to, be consulted. Where in the past a decision was made on the spot by a Matron, now simple queries were being referred to distant committees who would juggle the problem around in the air, leave half of it up there, then refer it on up the ladder.

While at the top of the pile managers grew fat from being indispensable no such gravy existed at the bottom.

The wards, although looking more like homes, could only reach coping levels in terms of providing nursing staff. Night nurses, mostly unqualified nursing assistants, found themselves in sole charge of two or sometimes three wards throughout the night. Young student nurses found themselves in charge of wards for days on end. On wards of elderly men a patient dies in a pool of his own vomited blood huddled around a toilet bowl without even the dignity of dying on a ward that was staffed. A young girl in the throes of an epileptic seizure traps her arm behind a radiator and suffers severe burns. It is some hours before an overstretched Sister finds her on her rounds ... the list goes on and on until it bores you into a sense of weary nausea that eventually you will shut your ears to.

However, here I am at this meeting finding myself as the Branch Chairman. Christ! I don't even know what a composite resolution is let alone how to 'negotiate' or 'have a word with management'. Were it ever necessary for me to venture near the administrative block I'd find myself making an unconscious detour. 'What the hell' I found myself asking 'had I taken on?'

Trade unionism at Calderstones had barely had a history. Odd individuals were remembered from the past as Charge Nurse so-and-so who had a cushy number or was soon promoted. Before reorganisation the Branch Chairman

or Secretary had occasionally popped in to see the Hospital Management Committee where he had got a yes, or more often a no, to a query. But if he had made any gains at all they had been made on the strength of his personality. Such questions as mobilising the shop floor or industrial action simply never arose. Every so often management held cheese and cucumber sandwich affairs on some pretext where local union officials (there were twelve different unions at Calderstones) had the opportunity to meet senior management. I went to one soon after being elected. Unfortunately I have a drinking problem. I never went to any more. No more were ever held.

There were fifteen people elected to form the Branch Executive that night, with perhaps only one with any knowledge of Trade Unionism. Proposed at that meeting came a call for 'something to be done' about our staffing levels. The retiring Chairman explained that he, along with the COHSE Full Time Officer (FTO) had taken this grievance right up to Area Health Authority level. The Branch still pressed for 'something to be done'.

From that moment on I began to soak up every scrap of information I could on Trade Unionism and the various complex power structures that contaminate the National Health Service (NHS).

I met my first FTO - Eddie Lawson. Regional Secretary of COHSE, a professed moderate, ex-Guards Sergeant Major. Recognised as a brilliant recruiter, he bullied membership up to 30,000 from 4,000 in four years. Alas, his capacities as a recruiter were not matched in his commitment to the working man and woman. When the history of the NW NHS is written, people may stop to ask what were COHSE doing about it? How could they sit back and do nothing? - Because me old mate, they were hand in glove with leading personalities in the NHS power structure.

Lesson One: Because someone wears a Union badge and is employed by you as a FTO to defend and improve your conditions, doesn't necessarily mean that they are on your side.

But back to the ranch. For some months the Unions had been allocated an office. It had lain unused with a desk, filing cabinets, a few chairs and a telephone. Much to the consternation of management I placed a large sign outside announcing a daily lunch time surgery. And as people called in I got to learn all about pay, work study, leave entitlements; in fact all the nitty gritty that goes to make up daily TU work. If I didn't know anything I'd ring

up a FTO. Looking back now, fifteen calls a day (and most evenings) were perhaps a bit much - but it took me a long time to work out the role of an FTO.

Myself and the Branch Secretary call a meeting of all the hospital union reps and put to them COHSE's resolution that something should be done about staffing levels, viz: that we should ballot the whole hospital with regard to sounding out the possibility of us taking Industrial Action. It is unwise to apply national reputations to local union branches. And our hospital was in a sorry state. NUPE [National Union of Public Employees - readers should note that Peter refers to unions which are now obsolete. COHSE, NUPE and NALGO, the National Union of Local Government Officers, all merged in 1993 to form UNISON, Britain's largest trade union - *ed*] with about 250 members (all ancillary staff and most of the night nurses) was run by old Bob, a nice enough fella who'd been doing the job for years and had a cushy number running the clothing stores, felt that it would take several months to sound out all his members. The Royal College of Nursing (a hyper-elitist organisation run by retired matrons) were not happy at all. Thus we took these unhelpful soundings back to our executive and it was decided to go it alone and ballot all COHSE members.

Years ahead of Tory manifestos we decide that the ballot must be secret. Remember we were dealing with staff who only looked on Trade Unions as some sort of insurance policy who'd be there to provide help should something go amiss. Certainly there was an overwhelming feeling (including me) that Industrial Action could not include walking out on patients.

Permission was sought and granted from management to walk around and conduct a ballot. We chose six 'responsible nurses' to monitor and carry the sealed box around the hospital accompanied by a shop steward. The steward's job was to record whether a member had voted and enter their name in a big book. Balloting was to take place over three days and two nights.

And from that first day of balloting things began to take an interesting turn. For the staff, for COHSE, the other unions, the press, management and for me personally.

The Staff. It quickly became apparent that there was massive support for the ballot. Folk would read the leaflet, exclaim complete agreement, mark

the paper with a cross and exclaim, 'at last something's being done'. It also became apparent that something was sadly amiss with our branch records. Our darling Secretary had completely ignored branch administration with the sole exception of the quarterly cheque. But perhaps more of that anon. At the start of the ballot we had an estimated membership of 190. As it turned out the ballot proved to be the best recruiting campaign of all times. Stewards had their pockets crammed with COHSE application forms. Within three days we had over 400 members.

The other Unions. The other unions had no choice but to wake up. Blissfully unaware of the TUC's Bridlington Agreement (which strictly discourages inter-union transfers) we unashamedly poached people from other unions and preached the omnipotence of COHSE. NUPE's monopoly of night staff crumbled the first night the ballot went round on night shift. NALGO's thirty nursing members were reduced to five in as many hours.

The Press. Fortunately the *Lancashire Evening Telegraph* was not an anti union paper - more a benign muckraker. Whoever stirred up the muck they'd publish it, word for word in thumping great headlines that on occasions, even startled me! As everywhere our local radio was desperate for solid local news and a similar philosophy existed there.

Management. Oh dear. The management reacted differently at different levels. The hospital managers willingly passed up responsibility to the District. The District Press Officer, a young woman on £8,500 p.a. whom I only ever met once, would issue the same monotonous statement: 'No comment, it is not the policy of the Burnley Health District to discuss internal problems with the media.'

It was at Unit level that the real problems began. A Unit comprises several wards or Therapy departments, employs maybe 50 staff and is managed by a Unit Officer. We had 15 Unit Officers at Calderstones and a fair mixture of young whizz kids and jobs-for-the-boys-until-retirement is a fair summary. Only one, John our Branch Vice Chairman, was sympathetic to trade unionism, each one of his management colleagues was eventually to stab him in the back.

This level is important because it's the only level of management that the ward staff see each day. Unit Officers plan shifts, holidays, staff deployment, overtime and have a major say in promotional policy.

We'll return to those Unit Officers later but for now I'll keep to my own. Dear Trevor wasn't such a bad lad really. Young, ambitious, keen to get on he was OK provided you steered him away from making managerial decisions. His attitude towards Trade Unions was taken from yesterday's *Daily Mail* - but he was at least honest about it. Given the option I'd sooner be kicked in the teeth than stabbed in the back.

The day after the ballot started I was demoted from Charge Nurse to Deputy Charge Nurse (on administrative grounds) and forcibly transferred from my Community work project to the hospital farm.

Pendle View (the farm) was the very antithesis of my idea of work for learning disabled people. It served as the hospital showpiece where all the visitors were shown around. Rabbit hutches, landscaped gardens, giant aviaries - all of which mustn't be touched except by the chosen few patients. Patients were divided into gangs under the supervision of a nursing assistant. The pressure on the staff was to achieve results with tasks and not the patients, with the inevitable result that the nurse would do the job while the patient held his or her coat.

The unit was run by Sam. Old, ambitious, keen to get on, he was OK provided you steered him away from making decisions. His attitude to Trade Unions was just to the right of Rhodes Boyson - but never to your face. Unfortunately, old Sam was Branch Secretary of NALGO (Nursing). Old Sam gave me five of his most difficult patients and instructed me to transport 50 tons of gravel from the Works Department down to Pendle View. We were issued with two wheelbarrows and four shovels. Never one for mathematical analysis I estimated that this would take some five months on the outside.

Along with the Ballot we launched our Branch Newspaper. Unimaginatively entitled *Info* it was a chirpy mixture of employment rights, events, outrageous libel and anonymous interviews. Management described it as scurrilous and blatantly anarchistic. On two subsequent occasions the District Personnel Officer attempted to bring legal proceedings against its editors. Management refused permission for it to be distributed through the hospital postal system. When asked why I was told that they could not condone a magazine printed by the Underground Press Syndicate being circulated on Crown property.

Needless to say the staff loved it. In fact it was the only paper, amongst all the very professional union journals distributed around the hospital, that people sat down and read from cover to cover. There's a lesson in that somewhere.

The Ballot was counted in front of a packed Branch meeting. The scrutineers returned a thumping 91 per cent in favour of taking Industrial Action. Then I announced a mass meeting for the following Wednesday for all hospital staff in the Central Ballroom. News spread like wildfire not only through Calderstones but in other local hospitals. Here was a union actually calling a meeting of all hospital staff and threatening industrial action. Those few days leading up to the mass meeting at Calderstones were indeed heady days. Shop Stewards became hero figures, everyone wore a COHSE badge and the talk was all COHSE.

Come the Wednesday and the hall is packed. Natty dressed young men from the BBC and Granada sweep arc lamps across the assembled staff, as I with John stand atop a couple of tables. It's a strange feeling - power, like the goose with delusions of gander it can easily go to the head. It's oh so easy to sway a crowd packed into a confined space. Forget about the minor questions, just put your case with passion and confident logic, the feeling of the mob will take care of the rest. Each group needs its Ian Paisley, its Brian Clough, its Enoch Powell. Their reassuring logic helps you sort out your problems - so much easier to go along with the mass.

The meeting voted to commence industrial action from the following Monday. It included staff taking all meal breaks, one qualified staff to be in charge of each ward at all times. Staff were only to accept responsibility for one ward.

Things by now had almost become impossible for me personally. The press were ringing me constantly, as were a dozen different hospitals and the local SWP! Old Sam would simply announce that Mr. Good is not available and I would be plodding back and forth with my barrows of gravel and five fairly unmanageable lads. I would arrange permission from Sam to attend a meeting at a certain time and then minutes before the meeting was due to start Trevor would turn up, overrule Sam and declare that I cannot be spared. One eventually learns to live with paranoia and come to like it really.

Still Monday came and to avoid silly games I along with John took a week's leave to 'nurse' the action through. We practically lived in the union office. Rarely did the phone stop ringing and we were besieged with queries, visitors, reporters, bottles of ale and chip butties.

Within two days the District Management Team asked for an emergency meeting with all the Trades Unions at Calderstones. A packed conference room with all these impeccably dressed managers at one end and all the unions at the other; equally well dressed except me who appeared in what was to become known as my negotiating jeans. This really was the first time I'd ever seen FTOs in action. Brilliant speakers and negotiators - and really with no industrial muscle they had to be.

The Chairman opened the meeting by asking the union to state their case. An invitation my FTO accepted by saying he could do no better than ask 'Mr. Good to state the case from ward level.' Christ I nearly fell through the floor. I stumbled and stuttered and felt like a juggler very conscious of an unappreciative audience, my confidence slipping with each ball. From there the meeting went from waffle to waffle, the FTOs vying with each other to score points on eloquence yet afraid to commit themselves. And each manager trying to prove himself as having full control over his own area of responsibility.

A word though about our District Nursing Officer. Managers in the NHS who prove themselves to be incompetent are never sacked as are more junior nurses; instead they are promoted out of the way or if they are really bad they are moved sideways. The latter fate fell to our DNO who was moved from Preston to Burnley District Management Team. A move described by a senior Preston manager as 'our gain and your loss'.

Ms Blackstock is elderly, ambitious and keen to get on and OK if she can be steered away from making a decision. Alas she insisted on making such decisions with alarming regularity. As a manager she was atrocious, as each colleague she worked with admitted. Privately mind you, privately, Ms Blackstock and I never hit it off from the start.

That particular meeting ended in nothing. Management insisting that things were not ideal but their graphs showed that there were adequate levels of staff.

I learned much at that meeting. That night I took off to the woods and with a bottle of Bells for company worked it all out.

Lesson one and most important of all is that as a Shop Steward you must lose all fear of people. That includes not only management, but the press, your own members, and FTOs. Such an obvious lesson reads much easier than it is in practice. Number two is to be totally honest throughout. I knew I could never develop the art about talking about nothing (called snowing) at negotiations. Thirdly it was imperative that we develop some sort of industrial muscle. Walk outs and strikes were clearly out of the question. And it was pretty obvious that senior management were not too concerned about staff not taking meal breaks and wards could always be covered by junior management who were expendable anyhow.

So we went to town. We called a press conference in the local pub and newsmen from the *Sun*, *Mirror*, and *Mail* and all the rest got disgustingly drunk as we gave out our problems to the world. We'd worked on the statement all the previous night and had it planned down and checked to the last detail. We even had Sally there in her uniform who agreed to cross her legs at strategic points in the conference!

We announced to the world the results of staff shortages and cuts, our patients dying and being burned. That afternoon we were to call another mass meeting and ask staff to agree to a motion calling for *one week's notice* of walk outs unless the DMT came up with concrete proposals.

That evening all the locals had mopped up the story in solid black headlines and the next morning the nationals devoted a few columns to the 'horror hospital' and 'Patients die in staff starved hospital'. This, coupled with a resounding vote for a week's notice of walk outs that afternoon, was too much for the powers that be. The Area Health Authority stepped in and asked for an urgent meeting at Preston. Now the AHA is really big potatoes, based in a converted hotel overlooking the railway station, its five floors are responsible for running health services throughout Lancashire.

Again a massive boardroom with all the same people there plus additional big time AHA. We dominated the meeting with eight stewards and really we had the AHA trapped. We demanded and got immediately extra staff for nights, an independent inquiry into staffing levels and weekly meetings with

local management to identify and solve critically staffed areas. Things certainly looked rosy.

The next day we called a meeting of all shop stewards and elected our side of the inquiry. Out of this meeting we formed the Calderstones Joint Shop Stewards Committee (to get to grips with the situation). Beset with problems from the start - COHSE FTOs refused to recognise it as did management, we excluded the Royal College of Nurses on the grounds of them being a joke organisation - but a fragile cohesiveness was held under the banner of working together as trade unionists.

Our agreement with AHA soon fell into difficulties although the thing was down in black and white. At the newly formed weekly meeting with local management we quickly fell into difficulties over interpretation. Management wanted the meetings to develop into cosy chats over long term policy. They were unwilling to be pushed into employing extra staff to cover unstaffed wards as we had agreed. We learned much later that the AHA had forbade them to do any such thing - though no one had the gumption to tell us that, even our FTOs.

Our agreement on the inquiry was that it should be formed from two union and two management nominations with a mutually acceptable chairman. As reported we had chosen our two lads and suggested a good chairman all within 24 hours. Alas the AHA interpreted the agreement differently. After much too-ing and fro-ing I eventually received a long letter from the AHA insisting that the inquiry should be formed of two management representatives only.

This was really too much when coupled with our growing frustration at local level. But what could we do? We'd been very cleverly out-manoeuvred by some very clever politicking. The novelty of mass meetings was wearing thin and criticism was coming from the wards that the ballot had achieved nothing.

We started to plan what was to become known as 'Imaginative Industrial Action'. Our plan was to take over Ms Blackstock's office and stay there until we received positive assurances from the AHA. We had a "shock group" of six stewards and were well loaded with food and a banner to fly from her window. Our difficulty arose in finding a spirited feminist (we were taking a small chemical toilet and a screen for Ms B.) our soundings

were somehow leaked to the authorities who greeted the threat with such alarm that we were offered an immediate reconvened meeting. A pity really, I'd always wanted to have a long chat with the lady.

At that meeting we got and agreed the terms for a full blown inquiry and official letters were sent out that day to our nominees.

Alack, difficulties were being experienced in taking our FTOs along with us and I suppose it was about time that we decided in future we'd sort the job out ourselves. Indeed our skills as negotiators were improving by the minute. My fear of anyone and everyone had long ago fluttered out of the window. I'd gotten to know all the local journalists on a personal level and I was more or less retained by Radio Blackburn to comment on health service affairs. The media prefer spokespeople to be able to give short snappy heavily biased comments off the cuff. Such a spokesperson was I.



I began to rise in the Trade Union world. Elections to Trades Councils, committees and outside meetings took place every week. Very soon I was a walking office, with files, briefcases, telephone messages at home, work and the local pub. Yet all this time I was still moving gravel from A to B and growing quite attached to my five lads.

Unions are only as strong as their local branches. Under such an adage we took over the negotiating for the hospital and wrote afterwards to our FTOs to 'keep them in the picture'.

We were back at the weekly meetings with a vengeance. Every weekend we had stewards roving the hospital monitoring staffing levels and we'd present these figures to management each Monday morning. Clearly local managers, who even at a local level had little idea what was actually happening on their own wards, couldn't cope with this. In desperation they ordered all their Unit Officers to attend each Monday meeting to account for their Unit's staffing level. For the most part harmless yes-men they were unable to deal with what was a virtual public interrogation. This exercise didn't earn us extra staff but my name permanently prefixed with "that union bastard ..."

All was not well in other departments either. The kitchens which had worked happily for years were reorganised and work studied. The two old cooks who had run the place since the war were placed under a gastronomic whizzkid and the place had rumbling indigestion from then on.

I recall one morning when a message was sent to me asking for my presence at the kitchens. Sam asked Trevor who ruled no if it were for union business. Unfortunately the kitchen staff then walked out en masse and somehow another message was sent to Trevor from way above, who came running round to tell me he'd had a change of heart and I could go at once. It transpired that the cooks had had a bellyful from the Burnley District Catering Manager and were out for six hours before we got them back.

In negotiating I'd never go in alone; I insisted on taking two cooks, elected on the spot, to go with me. A practice viewed as highly irregular by the management but in my view the only defence against selling your members out.

The weekly meetings were clearly getting nowhere in improving our critically staffed areas. The problem was put to our branch meeting and I

was mandated to write to the AHA asking for another meeting to clarify our previous agreements. We reasoned that because of the gravity of our complaint such a meeting should take place within ten days, and should it not, then the branch would consider it to be in dispute as from 4 pm on Sunday.

Thus on Sunday we sat in the union office awaiting some chance last minute message. No such communication came and at 4 pm, we entered into dispute.

The North West Regional Health Authority (really big potatoes this) occupies a massive office block leading up to Manchester's Piccadilly station. Just inside its imposing glass fronted entrance is a smallish kiosk where a very pretty receptionist sits greeting arriving dignitaries and asking them to sit down in the plush waiting area.

Dead on nine o' clock on Monday morning four of us occupied that kiosk.

Now there's a knack to occupying reception kiosks. Firstly you must all be well dressed, it's no good looking like a muppet with long hair and jeans; it creates too much alarm. You mustn't falter even for a second. We simply walked straight in with a cheery 'good morning' to the receptionist and stood in a cramped line behind her. It took exactly 21 seconds from entering the building. Peter (a Spanish ward orderly, ex CNT and weighing 18 stones) kept his hand on the door handle which ensured the place a no-go area.

Well the pretty girl was outraged. Utterly devoid of humour she screamed at us to get out. She rang 'Security' and a man came running down threatening us with damnation if we didn't leave immediately. I just kept repeating very calmly 'We are Trade Unionists in dispute with Lancashire AHA and we shall not leave until we have a date for a meeting with them', and gave him a sweet smile. Off he went and we remained saying 'good morning' to all the arriving office workers.

The pretty girl was most unhelpful. She refused to talk to us apart from periodically pleading with us to get out. In the end we just smiled at her. Outside we had Taffy as an observer and I held up a notice giving the external phone number of the kiosk. Within fifteen minutes John from Calderstones had rung through announcing that there was all hell to pay

about the occupation and that he was just going into the pre-arranged press conference.

Down came a finely suited Scotsman from the upper floors who was all very nice about it and asked what we wanted. Off he went back upstairs. Meantime the gentlemen of the press arrived and that got too much for the pretty girl. She was relieved by an even prettier girl who entered into the spirit of the thing, even giving us a sup of her tea.

Down came McKneegrasper again and he said the AHA were prepared to meet us the following morning at 9 o' clock.

The next morning hardly got off to a good start for Trevor wasn't going to release me from duty. But by nine o' clock someone must have had a word with him and he had another change of heart.

It was not a happy meeting. The AHA complained of industrial relations being conducted in such a manner and we asked how else could we conduct them if letters and agreements don't appear to mean a thing. Out of a very lengthy meeting we won the major concession of working with the DMT and AHA and told them we'd expect meaningful negotiations to commence within a fortnight.

Info No 6 had by now arrived from Ian the Printer and it was a blockbuster. Some 30 hospital staff had typed, glued, written and drawn a 16 page magazine all about Calderstones. Although it was edited collectively we found it best to hold one person responsible to co-ordinate each issue. Chris had worked like a Trojan, dragging in articles from the strangest quarters to produce a magazine worthy of national distribution were it not deliberately parochial.

Ms Blackstock had been holding monthly meetings for some time now with the Trade Union reps at the hospital. She chaired these meetings in a similar manner as her meetings with subordinate managers: one was expected to sit attentively, listen and at the right moment nod one's head. My philosophy of negotiating on an equal basis and an unfortunate habit I developed of asking 'why' at odd moments produced a poor chemical mix. We never hit it off. COHSE had tried everything to get through to this woman but to no avail. Every time I addressed her at a meeting she would stare out of the window and drum her fingers on the table. In the end I used to yawn whenever she

spoke and it was agreed that the Branch should use these meetings merely to introduce new stewards to management.

We asked Sammy and Mike to go to the next meeting. It reflects well on their calibre as stewards to say that they got up and walked out after 20 minutes.

Ms B. had announced without a by your leave, that because of further cuts the nursing staff was to be reduced by 19 !

In addition the agreement reached with the AHA on reallocating resources was to be confined merely to moving around existing nursing staff. Our 'interpretation' as she called it, for opening the books and seeing where the money was actually going, was not acceptable, it was management's right to manage ...

An emergency meeting of the Executive was summoned within the hour. The next day we had 1,000 leaflets going round the hospital calling for a mass meeting the following week. That leaflet really laid it on the line. It bitterly attacked the other unions for leaving everything to COHSE and nodding through management rubbish. New members came in droves, in one day alone there were 50 resignations from other unions and by the day of the mass meeting our membership stood at over 800.

At the mass meeting we stated simply: 'Trust your executive, we have something up our sleeves, it will not affect patient care. Give us a mandate to carry on.' We got that mandate on Wednesday lunchtime.

By now we had learned the lessons of secrecy and we gathered 16 trusted souls together. Come Friday lunchtime we were all gathered in the union office with strange bundles.

At 1:15 pm exactly, we hijacked a block of hospital wards. H Block is a building set out on its own. Comprising two floors with wards H1 and H2 it houses what is known colloquially as the 'worst cases'. These are the hopeless wrecks of humanity. People who couldn't speak, were continually incontinent, highly overactive, self-injurious and in the main needed full 24 hour care and attention. We chose the word 'hijack' carefully. They are building aeroplanes to run without pilots; are they trying to do the same in hospitals and run wards without nurses? The whole block had been allocated

three staff to run from Friday lunchtime right through until Monday lunchtime - we intended to man the place with what we saw as proper staffing levels until such time as the District agreed to remove the threatened cutbacks.

As ever we had everything planned out in detail. Doors were guarded, banners made from sheets were unfurled from the top floor windows and Tony politely (as was our style) informed the Central Nursing Office of the hijack. The kitchen staff were quickly appraised and agreed with the porters that all food would be passed through the ward window in containers.

There is a knack to hijacking hospital blocks. Most importantly you need staying power and mule-like determination. Remember we were living, eating and sleeping on H block 24 hours a day, and caring for 46 patients. In addition we had press, TV and radio. We were losing pay by the hour, pressures from wives, husbands and career prospects all played a part in some hijackers calling it a day by the first Sunday. As it happened five of us never left the block for the full 13 days of the occupation, although many people stayed with us off and on for varying periods ranging from half an hour to eight days. Management left us alone for the weekend with an 'It's not the policy of the AHA to discuss internal matters with the media...' to the press, but the oil burned very late in many offices that first night.

Monday the AHA summoned Mr. Lawson, who'd read about the hijack in the Sunday papers, to a meeting in Preston. We refused to leave the block, suggesting to the AHA that we would be prepared to negotiate through the food window. Lawson rings up later to put an offer from the AHA to us: Call off the occupation and they will *consider* paying us the lost time through absence; there can be no question of the AHA withdrawing the cuts. Our reply was perhaps a little strong for a family newspaper but a loose interpretation along the lines of 'Fuck Off' will suffice.

Meanwhile we threw a party for our patients and invited a local band to come and play for us. A party from MIND came over from Leeds and we won tremendous support from them. A delegation from the North West Anarchist Federation stayed a few hours and were well received. Shop stewards from other hospitals came to help, telegrams of support, endless press visits and calls from a Marxist abbreviation (I forget which) who seemed somewhat offended that we wouldn't sign up with them on the spot.

For years at Calderstones we've had a little old lady who would come in to the hospital unpaid and teach our patients to read; she'd also play the church organ on Sunday. She said that our actions were so humble and sincere in the eyes of Christ that she felt she had to share the burden with us - and promptly moved in. Her staying power for someone in her late sixties, roughing it on a couple of blankets in the linen cupboard is courage that deserves not to go unrecorded.

Alack, we fell foul of our local hospital manager. With our guard relaxed on the evening of Day 4 the man saunters in, does a very swift inspection, makes some sarcastic comments to the incumbent staff, then disappears. A letter is dispatched to him pointing out that any doctor can walk in when they wished to see a patient. Such a right (after all, H Block is our home as well) certainly did not extend to nursing managers. A reply was asked for by 10:30 the next morning, agreeing to this principle; otherwise the dispute would be escalated. No reply was received. Thus at 11 am, we stopped the catering staff from bringing tea and biscuits to their offices. Not perhaps the most alarming escalation in the history of industrial disputes but the press did wonders with it. He never came back for another visit.

The dispute ended by courtesy of the Independent Inquiry, sitting for the second time on Day 13 of the highjack. They demanded to see the Chairman of the AHA and said (a) we cannot conduct an inquiry if an industrial dispute is taking place and (b) it is entirely improper for the AHA to carry out cuts in staffing levels while an inquiry is taking place. Unless (a) and (b) were not reversed then the inquiry chairman was prepared to call an immediate press conference to announce the end of the inquiry as being pointless.

Mr. Lawson made his first visit to the hospital that day. Day 13 at 1:45pm. He came down to see us to put newly offered terms from the AHA to us. Entirely to our satisfaction we took down our banners, said farewell to our patients and retired to Clitheroe Working Men's Club where, literally exhausted, we drank of Lancashire's finest.

Back to work on the gravel train again which seemed silly somehow. Once you have tasted total control over your work - which was what the highjack was - anything else becomes unpalatable.

The Independent Inquiry reported a month after H Block and said basically that the hospital was running at 250 staff short of what was required and strongly recommended that ACAS (the Arbitration, Conciliation and Advice Service) be called in to hammer out some Industrial Relations procedures.

In a press statement we blamed entirely Ms Blackstock for the appalling state of industrial relations and called again for Calderstones to be withdrawn from the Burnley Health District. It was agreed that we hold a series of working parties to discuss the implementation of the inquiry recommendations. It was at the first of these meetings that I met Bob Quick. Christ what a difference. A junior FTO, the elders having given us up, he saw his role as an advisor to his members and not some omnipotent god who had his members safely under control.

At these meetings we agreed to call ACAS in. We made interim agreements on industrial relations matters and the recommendation for 250 extra staff would be considered by the AHA urgently.

Sadly, for my tale is reaching an obvious conclusion, the AHA is still considering those extra staff today.

Come December 1977 and my first AGM, I was elected Branch Secretary. With 12 months' history we hadn't done badly for novices. In addition I was elected to COHSE's Regional Executive (big potatoes that) and to be the delegate at the national conference in June 1978. Yet more promotion, I was elected Chairman of the Burnley Health Districts Shop Stewards Committee and I became the local Trades Council Secretary. An offer came from another NHS union to become a FTO which I declined and all seemed set to alter the course of trade unionism in Lancastrium. And the latter was no idle boast; we saw it as the responsibility of the trade unions to get to grips with the NHS - why not use bus workers, engineers, teachers in cooperating in a cross fertilisation of ideas?

At a local level we began to hammer out the branch into a living entity. As we saw it, a centre of free thought and imagination. We offered free education courses to our members. We roped in local firms to give us discounts. The TUC runs a travel club offering ultra cheap holidays. We got all our student nurses cut price rail cards. Working through the Trades Council we got a couple of engineering apprentices to convert a NHS wheelchair into a simple mechanically operated machine, which they did at

a twentieth of the MRP. Two of our stewards worked (albeit unsuccessfully) on a research project to convert all the administrative offices into patients' living quarters, moving the managers into an open plan office complex. We started an under-fives play group and initiated and led a Tenants Association that was to win some major concessions in tied crown property.

February 1978 and the AHA announced that they were withdrawing the nurses assisted travel schemes. Calderstones was one of four large mental hospitals in the area, all of them miles away from population centres, and to encourage under-paid staff they had for years run a scheme whereby a percentage of a nurse's bus fare was met by the AHA. We met as shop stewards from all four hospitals and wrote to the AHA demanding a meeting within 10 days. Predictably no reply was received, so one sunny morning 33 stewards from each hospital occupied the foyer of Lancashire AHA's plush office block. Unfortunately the musical instruments, accordion, mouth organs and much percussion, with which we planned to 'entertain' the office workers got forgotten somewhere. We left after three hours with firm dates for negotiations without FTOs and uncontaminated with the presence of the RCN.

Round about March 1978 a minor but important development took place. Local management announced that in future shop stewards requiring time off to attend to union business should seek permission from their unit officers and not their immediate superiors. In effect this meant that I should ask permission from Trevor and not Sam who had by now given up on me.

Trevor approached his new found task with the zeal of a senior boy scout leader. Each request became a major investigation and things rapidly became hairy between us.

We approached management about the change in an agreed procedure and they claimed it wasn't a 'change' but an 'interpretation' and were therefore able to make the move safely. Such is the nonsense of TU / Management jargon. We appealed to the next line in the hierarchy. Ms Blackstock. who totally agreed with the new interpretation, but kindly consented to pass the appeal up to the AHA.

By now really strange things were beginning to happen. My local manager called me into his office, to be precise at 4:15 pm on 22nd May 1978, and quietly warned me to be extremely careful over my trade union activities,

particularly those relating to time off, as the Burnley District Management Team were after my blood.

Tony, our Branch Chairman, foolishly overstayed a lunch break by an hour, which he admitted to his Unit Officer on his return. The following day he was up on a disciplinary charge and was demoted and thrown off his ward. We began to receive reports from members that several Royal College Nurses were reporting COHSE stewards' activities and conversations to management. Two stewards were told not to apply for promotional posts because of their union allegiance.

Four officers were now present from ACAS and although they were experts at discretion and listening, they let it be known that they were alarmed at the level of harassment taking place.

ACAS's technique is to listen to management and stewards and eventually fit them into a ready made set of procedures. They are loath to report on anything that one side will see as contentious, lest that side reject the report in total. By now wise to committees and earnest young chaps in suits we wrote them off as a dead loss long before the eventual report was published.

My personal fortunes were fairing no better. The gravel was finally finished and I was set to work constructing a perimeter path around a nine acre field with my lads. Things took an interesting turn when I discovered quite by chance that Trevor had for months been submitting reports to higher management that read, 'Mr. Good's patients returned to the wards because he is again on union activities.' Each report failed to mention that on each occasion I had been granted permission and it was either Sam's or Trevor's managerial decision to return the lads to their wards.

Equally, Trevor was being supplied with information from a higher source. For instance I'd return from a meeting with the District Management Team eight miles away in Burnley, and he'd call me into his office and demand to know why I hadn't returned at 1:30 instead of 2 o' clock because the union de-briefing finished at midday.

He'd also begun calling in my work colleagues - swearing them to secrecy and asking them to sign a prepared statement on my union activities. The second nurse he got to sign came and told me and I subsequently won a

copy of it through the Grievance Procedure. It remains in my possession today as a living example of juvenile nonsense.

All this happening within the space of a fortnight was really too much. We published yet another 1,000 leaflets that accused management of blatant harassment against COHSE stewards, inviting all members to attend the next branch meeting; we'd place the full facts as we saw them before the pleasure of the assembled branch.

Tony returned in the meantime from the appeal on permission for time off with the Area Health Authority who had ruled that the interpretation on consent for time off was 'non-negotiable'.

At the branch meeting it was proposed that as equal partners in a joint agreement we should take a leaf from management's book and adopt our own interpretation on the Time-Off Procedure. Thus a letter was sent to management on 7th June 1978 (and take note of these dates, they get important) saying that should a Steward require time off he or she should INFORM their immediate superior that they were going off. As such we were in dispute with management.

Now let's digress a little. As reported I was elected as a delegate to the COHSE National Conference which was to be held in Scarborough the third week in June. Now Scarborough is 113 miles away from Calderstones and I know, for I walked every inch of the way. For some months I'd been pacing the lanes of Lancashire in training for my four day trek - and Christ was I looking forward to it. Every single day since that original AGM I'd spent some period of time in the hospital. I looked on the walk as some sort of psychological enema and I loved every minute of it. Across Lancashire and Yorkshire by day and at night I drank myself senseless in some b + b pub. Each mile was sponsored in aid of the union benevolent fund.

I'd always wondered how union conferences could attract such large numbers while more humble movements had relatively only a handful. The answer is simple. Each delegate is paid a handsome backhand.

I was paid £10 a day plus rail fares for the wife and kids - it was our first holiday in nine years of wedded bliss. And by Allah I wasn't alone, union conferences are made up of folk who annually holiday for a week at some such resort and receive a paid holiday on behalf of the union.

So the conference gave me a standing ovation for the walk - it was soon to know me better. I was up and down like a bridegroom's bum off that speakers' rostrum. I spoke for this and against that and was singularly successful in getting my own resolution through, amidst furious debate, in getting COHSE to actively work towards Joint TUC affiliated union committees. I laid it on the line about having to work with such useless groups as the Royal College of Retired Nurses and the Association of Superannuated Chiropodists. All of which means little to the outside world but it meant that COHSE had taken a more radical turn. For my troubles I was heavily slagged in the national nursing press of June / July 1978. But by then I had other problems.

Returning from conference (by train this time) I'm informed that no COHSE steward had met with any problem in taking time off. Even Chris, whose pedantic loyalty to democratic union decisions, had informed his Unit Officer on 8th June what action he was required to take, had remained unscathed.

Monday morning on 26th June I arrive back at work. I've been moved off the gangs and put into a classroom teaching patients basic reading skills. Paranoiacs amongst you will notice that the classroom is next to Trevor's office. Come 11:30 I see to it that my patients are fine, ask the nurse in the next class to keep an eye on them, inform the Sister in charge that I'm off on union business and go off to attend the Monday meeting with management.

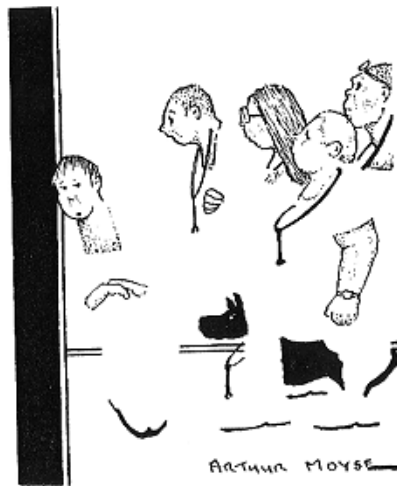
On my return Trevor is furious and I politely (as is my style) inform him that under the terms of the dispute I am required to INFORM and not ask. He moves me back to the gangs. Throughout the rest of the week I, with the other stewards, am left untouched. I simply inform Sam that I'm off and I go. At the time we didn't attach too much importance to management's attitude to us. We thought they'd merely make a few preliminary noises and let the dispute drift into nothing pending the ACAS report. It was not to be.

The following Monday (3rd July) Tony, the Branch Chairman, returns from his holiday and both of us inform our immediate superior that we are going off to attend the weekly meeting with management.

After that meeting ends I am waiting outside the boardroom to meet the District Catering Manager about the latest hiccup in the kitchens. The

meeting had been convened under the agreed Grievance Procedure. As I wait up pops the Personnel manager with a letter for me from Ms Blackstock - you have been reported absent from duty and I am stopping your pay for the period of time in question - that's it, no right of appeal, no hearing, no nothing.

Still, in with the Catering Manager but within ten minutes in bursts a Personnel Officer who states she has orders to close this meeting immediately as management 'will not be a party to false pretences'.



'This gentleman's one of the healing profession's greatest tragedies--a hypochondriac who's allergic to medicine!'

I summon an emergency Executive meeting. The lot of us have had a bellyful of this. Thus at 3 pm, in front of all the other stewards, I telephone the head Personnel Officer and tell him that COHSE is withdrawing from all agreed procedures, viz: the Grievance Procedure, Disciplinary Procedure, all meetings and committees. I also write to him confirming our telephone conversation and making enough copies to give to each steward. That letter is on his desk first thing Tuesday morning.

That Tuesday afternoon myself and Tony are simultaneously handed letters telling us to attend a disciplinary hearing, clearly emphasising it is to be held under the auspices of the disciplinary procedure, on Thursday, to explain why we had been absent from work while we had been attending a meeting with them.

Wednesday evening (5th July) is our regular branch meeting and there's about 40 in attendance. We put the developments to them and they vote to support the Executive decision to withdraw from procedures and agree that under the terms of the dispute the Branch Secretary and Chairman cannot attend the hearings the following day.

Come Thursday at 3 pm and a phone call from Tony. He had just been ordered to attend the Nursing Manager's office; he went and found a whole posse of them there. Asked to explain why he was 'late' for his hearing, he reiterates the Branch's letter of 3rd July and leaves.

Half an hour after my hearing is due to start I'm instructed by phone to come to the office immediately.

'No sir.'

'Then I am informing you that you are suspended from duty from this moment and you are to leave the premises at once.'

'Thank you.' (as is my style)

Tony gets similar treatment and we meet up at my place for a stiff bottle of Bells and await developments.

Now get this. Within *minutes* of us being suspended management have sent out leaflets to every ward and department in the hospital (itself a mammoth administrative task); these leaflets 'appraise staff of the facts'. Equally management call one person of each ward to a mass meeting where they are again 'appraised of the facts' and sent back to the wards.

Elsewhere in the hospital the Executive call an emergency meeting and they call a mass meeting of the whole hospital for Wednesday 12th July. Management are informed about this the next morning. That afternoon we both get sent registered letters telling us to attend further disciplinary hearings (to explain why we had refused to attend the day before). These hearings are to be held on Tuesday 11th July.

In come our senior FTOs who advise us most strongly to attend these meetings. We bitterly disagree saying that only our members can reverse a branch decision, and the earliest that could be done is Wednesday.

Well, the press went to town on this. Our pictures were blasted from the headlines above an extensive summary of the hospital's industrial history. Calderstones was dubbed as having the worst industrial relations record in the North West. Our house was turned into an HQ. The phone literally danced 24 hours a day. Visitors, stewards, meetings, press, bottles and bottles of plonk.

The Executive call in Bob Howard, Secretary of the Lancashire Association of Trades Councils, and asked him to mediate in the matter. Now Bob's a straight guy, as honest as they come and an expert on Industrial Relations. His report of the mediation with management is worth recording if only to illustrate the quality and integrity of NHS management.

Halfway through his meeting with management a Personnel Officer bubbles out '... we think Good is being backed by a political group.' He is immediately interrupted by the other managers present with a 'You'd better keep quiet about that.'

At the end of his meeting Bob is told, 'We cannot agree to a postponement of the Tuesday hearings but we will give you an assurance that there will be no hasty action, no sackings.'

Come Tuesday and we do not attend the hearings as requested by our members. Wednesday all the hospital is waiting for the lunchtime meeting, the porters filled the hall with chairs and the electricians had rigged up a PA system. Two hours before the meeting is due to start management again leaflet the hospital. This leaflet informs everyone that they have sacked us.

There is furious debate within the Executive about taking the hospital over immediately. As Eddie Lawson arrives for the mass meeting and it is made known to us under no account must we enter hospital premises. We do not attend that meeting.

Now one must go back to my earlier thoughts on eloquent people swaying a mob. Eddie was playing games. He spent 40 minutes passionately spouting

his own innocence in the affair. He pleaded for the branch to allow him to fight our dismissals through the correct channels and that he would fight to the end for our reinstatement.

And that chums, carried the day, despite some bitter heckling, it was resolved that the two dismissed officials should appeal against sackings.

And really that's the end of my little tale. The decision of the meeting was more than a disaster for just us two. It saw the end of trade unionism at Calderstones. A lot of very sincere people got frightened off or eventually threw in their lot with management. But perhaps more of that anon.

In all we battled through five levels of appeal. Here's a brief resume.

Interim Relief Is a little known section of the Employment Protection Act whereby a FTO of a union can apply for immediate reinstatement for a shop steward if he can convince an Industrial Tribunal barrister that it seems likely that the dismissal was due to trade union activities. That hearing took place 10 days after our dismissals as required under the EPA. Eddie Lawson and his deputy were called in with management into 'chambers' to put our case forward. Some time later out pops Eddie's deputy who puts to us a request from the barrister that we should withdraw our case and go for a full Industrial Tribunal because (a) he does not think our dismissals were due to trade union activities and (b) he said that management have an extremely difficult case to prove and he strongly advised them to reach some sort of settlement before a Tribunal hearing. Naturally we withdrew our applications. Later, when it was too late, the FTO in question denied that he ever said such things to us.

Appeal to the Area Health Authority is hardly worth reporting on. Eddie gave a brilliant emotional speech that seemed to constitute an apology more than anything else. We lost.

It was soon after the AHA appeal fiasco that the jigsaw started to take shape. Eddie was required to submit a full report to COHSE's National Executive Committee on the events surrounding our dismissals. This report was judged by the NEC to be so blatantly biased that they despatched a National Officer to investigate the matter. His investigations won us each a union 'victimisation award' of £1,000. One began to hear disturbing rumours that Eddie had worked a deal with the AHA that our employment was not

only an embarrassment to them but to the union as well. Among his trusted confidants he told two people too many that 'COHSE would be better off without those two.'

I sent COHSE a polite letter saying that it would be in everyone's interest if I conducted our defence personally at the forthcoming Industrial Tribunal. Now this letter upset them for some reason. Here was a major case that was all the rage amongst management and staff throughout the North West and the defendants had dropped their union. The letter soured already tense relations to such an extent that we ended up fighting COHSE as well as management.

So I set to work. Days and days spent in the legal departments of various libraries. Long bus rides to lobby respected Trade Unionists, nearly all of whom helped immensely. I wrote and rewrote draft after draft of opening statements, statements of case and closing addresses.

In the best traditions of British justice Tribunals take months to arrive and ours was no exception. But first let's have an undercover look at these Tribunals. They sit to hear cases mainly about unfair dismissals. Led by a barrister as Chairman and flanked by a trade union and employer nominee, their task is to determine whether a dismissal was fair and reasonable under all the circumstances. The Trade Union nominee is the amusing post. All unions are required to submit a list of nominations to the Secretary of State who then *selects appropriate* nominations. In practice almost all posts go to retired FTOs and competition for a place on a Tribunal is fierce amongst ageing TU men and women.

In my time I attended some two dozen Tribunals as an observer, witness or advocate. Only twice did I come up against 'useful' Trade Union bench members. Two reasons make these posts plum jobs. The first is accountability. They are accountable to no-one. Two years ago the North West TUC were refused access to a list of all TU Tribunal members serving in Lancashire on the grounds of it not being in the public interest. Not to be outdone a sympathetic MP obtained the register. The most startling discovery was that the Secretary of State classed the National Farmers' Union as a Trade Union! NWTUC planned to hold a private meeting of these people to put forward mounting concern over the conduct of TU nominees at Tribunals. It says much for these folk when over a third refused to attend on the grounds that it would not serve the best interests of

justice ... And the second reason is the job itself. A day that starts at 10 am, finishes at 4:30 with two hours for lunch and, depending on very generous travelling expenses, produces a flat fee of £50 per day - well, everyone has their price and what better way to while away your days as a tame rabbit on a barristers' bench.

Slightly under one third of applications to a Tribunal (and I'm working from the TUC Industrial Law Review) result in a favourable result to the employee. And even if the poor sod should 'win' they are likely to receive £643 on average by way of compensation. Equally it's interesting to note and draw lessons from who actually uses Tribunals. Certainly not the tightly organised smaller unions. NATSOPA, SOGAT, the miners and the dockers hardly figure in the reams of legal books on Industrial Law. By far the greatest users are those unions with little industrial muscle. The public sector, the shopworkers, clerical staff and places of work where union branches are weak.

Latterly there are a fair number of people who turn up and defend themselves. Classed in several expensively published guidebooks for company executives as 'oddballs, mavericks and timewasters who see their own case as a lifelong crusade'.

Into such a category were placed your heroes, albeit tacitly, by the bench.

A crammed Tribunal hearing. A barrister in the chair who we discovered had just returned from South Africa as a circuit judge; to his left sat a very tame rabbit indeed - he hardly uttered a word throughout.

We based our case on three points:

- (1) That some other substantial reason lay behind our dismissals.
- (2) That we had been selected for dismissal while taking part in an industrial dispute. viz: ALL COHSE members had withdrawn from agreed procedures when we were placed on disciplinary charges.
- (3) Our dismissals were unfair and unreasonable under all the circumstances.

Well, we didn't stand a chance. I'd presumed that one should keep to polite, straightforward, honest questions and statements. How wrong I was. Management lied and lied through their teeth. If they didn't lie then they 'couldn't quite remember' or 'I must have been away at that time' or 'I don't know.' Throughout they were propped up by the chairman, who from time to

time would throw in the odd biased remark, cut short questions and declare things I saw as being totally crucial as merely irrelevant. It took all day for management to present its case and for me to cross examine them. Then the Chairman called a halt announcing that a resumed hearing will be held at a future date. A future date turned out to be four crippling months away; by that time our dole had run out and uncomfortable pressures were emanating from the benefit office.

Come the resumed hearing and management had done their homework very carefully. Only two Personnel Officers were present for their side, effectively preventing me from recalling essential witnesses. Even Ms Blackstock, (whom I'd subpoenaed on a witness order) failed to arrive because I had not observed a minor legal technicality. My argument that I wasn't aware of such technicalities carried no weight with our friend on the bench. There then followed what the local press described as 'a series of clashes' between myself and the bench, whereby I was implying dirty tactics on the part of the managers and he began to threaten me with costs should I demand an adjournment. He knew damn well that we could afford neither the time nor the costs.

Further 'clashes' occurred when the bench refused to accept ACAS's lengthy report on Calderstones as evidence. Much of this report contained direct observations on COHSE and the fact that management objected bitterly to me referring to the ACAS report perhaps illustrates which side the report favoured. How the hell do you prove to a court that you have been dismissed for trade union activities when they refuse to consider observations like 'management were trying to compromise (and perhaps hinder) the COHSE Branch Secretary ...' (see ACAS Report on Calderstones Hospital 1978) When it became obvious that we would have no alternative but to withdraw from the trial, he accepted the report. But we battled through with our witnesses, carefully producing verbal and written evidence that I felt (and still do) proved management were corrupt, dishonest and not worth a post on a third rate quango. Perhaps the saddest aspect happened towards the closing of the trial; I say 'sad' because I no longer feel angry about it. It became evident that COHSE had briefed management on one or two minor items of interest. Ah well, life must go on, I suppose.

At the end of the trial I submitted a nine page written summing up. It was the result of ten months' painstaking research - at the very least it deserved consideration. At the end we retired to the waiting room while the bench

went to consider its verdict. It took them all of 20 minutes. In retrospect I don't know what we were hoping for as we sucked at our bottle of plonk, but one holds on to straws.

The Tribunal found that we had been dismissed fairly, that we were guilty of attaching an inflated importance to our positions as branch officials and that we and our witnesses had been lying.

That night I sat slumped in our old battered armchair, took the phone off its hook while Sue found enough for a bottle of Scotch and I sat through the night right up until the postman delivered a curt letter from the hospital administrator giving us a month's notice to find other accommodation.

Blacklisted

Your average working man cannot wait ten months for a trial and live on the dole. True we each had our £1,000 but that rapidly got divided up between electricity bills, trips to campaign meetings, legal libraries, research lobbying and a rainy day fund. The dole was quite sympathetic - their advice to me was that I should get out of Lancashire as quickly as possible. Going for a job was a joke. Apart from applying for nursing posts I applied for a total of 26 labouring / unskilled vacancies over an 11 month period.

There is no law that says a company *must* employ you. A fact of life that allows personnel officers to open up and be honest with you. Remember that I was Ribble Valley's Trades Council Secretary and my name had been featured in the local media more often than Blackburn Rover's Manager had. Really, going for an interview was a farce. But I tried, Christ, I tried. An interview for a job bagging up caustic soda crystals lasted an hour and a half while I discussed the merits of the Employment Protection Act with some finely suited Personnel chap. In the end he shrugged his shoulders and said I'd stand a better chance if I were an ex-prisoner. The Garage owner's face, whose expression I'll never forget, when I suggested that I'd be the ideal person to man his petrol pumps. He told me very politely, 'Look piss off mate'. The haulage company that rejected me with a 'No thanks we're a non-union shop here.'

Each interview went on and on like that. In the end I became convinced that I must be a very dangerous person indeed.

Tony has perhaps fared worse than I. While I had dipped my oar in most things, he had only his nursing certificate. Since our dismissals he has applied for nursing jobs in all four corners of Christendom - he's not even secured a single interview in any hospital. It has been made known to me, indirectly, but authoritatively enough, that I'll never work as a nurse in the NHS again.

But the decision of the Industrial Tribunal began to needle me. I began to lose sleep over it - even several pints wouldn't remove nagging questions and glaring inconsistencies. I decided to go one rung up the ladder and make an appeal to a Crown Court on the Tribunal decision.

Tony's disillusionment with British justice was complete and after lengthy discussion over several jars he opted to have no further truck with future charades.

Now, Appeal Courts are essentially the province of black suited barristers and the Law Society discourages mavericks (as I found out later) from attending. I popped round to the nearest solicitor in an attempt to secure myself a brief in a wig. The practice referred me to its most junior partner who turned out to be most helpful but blissfully ignorant of matters industrial. He wrote off and secured quite easily a date for a Crown Court hearing - 5th July 1979 - the real problem arose in getting a decision from the Law Society for me to be represented. My solicitor wrote several times asking for a decision even to the extent of submitting an emergency application.

That process took the best part of three months. Two days before the actual hearing we received a polite little memo from the Law Society turning the application down. Without legal aid and the 'several hundred pounds' it would cost me to secure a brief I said 'balls to 'em', thanked the solicitor for all his help and wrote off to say that I would be defending myself.

I set to work immediately drafting and redrafting my defence. I kept at it solidly for eighteen hours until I ripped it all up in frustration and went out for a few jars.

I do not like court buildings. Somehow you can never approach them on an equal footing. You always seem to be looking up from down below. Perhaps they are designed that way. I went to Chester Crown Court on my own.

Some sort of kamikaze mission to get the whole thing out of my head really. As such I turned up there without any feelings of fear or timidity.

The usher greeted me: 'Ah Mr. Good, you are representing yourself I understand' - he went on about my hearing in court number Two - 'Starting probably at about eleven ... I see your case is only scheduled to last two hours ... if you'd like to take a seat in the corridor.' He directed me to a line of those ubiquitous tubular chairs where some worried-looking skinheads sat looking odd in newly purchased suits.

'Sorry mate.' I said. 'I want a room to put my papers together.' He began to view me with distaste.

'We only have rooms for barristers.'

'If my adversaries have got a room then I want one. If I'm not to be granted the same facilities as the barrister I'm up against then I intend kicking up shit in that courtroom.'

In less time than it takes to occupy a reception kiosk I was given a large conference room on the second floor to myself. I again attempted to organise something on paper but that only lasted a minute. Instead I spent an hour pacing up and down trying to walk off a grade eight hangover.

Number two court at Chester Crown Court is oak paneled all the way up to a ceiling fifty foot high. I was before a chap called Mr. Slynn, who I note from the judgement papers has the first name of Justice. I open by pleading that the Tribunal totally failed to take into consideration our case that we were taking part in an Industrial Dispute and in their (8 page) judgement had chosen to merely paraphrase management's opening statement.

Well from then on strange things (as they say) began to happen. The words bubbled out from me, reference points sprang to mind from a mass of documents, I brought up questions framed in the most precise legal terms. I really laid it on the line.

Suddenly the Judge took up my points. He threw questions at the barrister representing the North West Regional Health Authority like 'why can't union members withdraw from agreed procedures as a form of industrial action ...' 'What ... you mean to tell me is that these union officials were actually attending a meeting with management, who then deemed them to be absent from work?' and 'So that must mean they were taking part in an industrial dispute.'

This was all heady stuff and I could literally feel the posse of Personnel Officers sited behind the barristers squirming in embarrassment. The Judge pursues this line of questioning for half an hour, then stops to confer with his aides.

“We,” he announces 'are of the opinion that this has a more complex background than appears on an initial reading.' He calls for a two hour adjournment so that the bench can retire to re-read the evidence presented. Such action is apparently highly unusual in legal processes. It had my heart racing and sent the Personnel Officers scurrying to the barristers' chambers.

Eventually we were recalled and the judge puts to their barrister that my dismissals stems from something really quite trivial, offers a short speech on the national nursing shortage and asks that I be taken back, letting bygones be bygones. 'No don't bother asking, I can see by the expressions behind you that that won't be possible.' With this Justice Slynn slams his documents together and announces an adjournment for lunch giving management a look, that only judges can, that appears to say they're guilty of kicking his pet cat. As we stand for them to leave the atmosphere is electric. The posse again scurry into chambers and I feel like finding the nearest grog shop to rehearse a premature celebration.

I did drink that night but for different reasons. The case ploughed on throughout the afternoon getting very bogged down in legal niceties. But if one plays the legal game it has to be played to their rules. In the end the court ruled, amidst much legal verbiage that my application for a reconvened Tribunal was dismissed with the exasperating rider that:

'We have had from Mr. Good an admirable and careful presentation of the case, and it may be that before the Industrial Tribunal the matter was not perhaps put as favourably on this particular point or perhaps so precisely as it has been put before us today.'

But I did walk from that court with my head in the air. That day saw the end of my adventure in Trade Unionism.

Workpoints

Trade Unions: The fact that COHSE were more of a hindrance than a help to us doesn't mean to say that they are the worst of the Public Service unions nor indeed are any different from other Trades Unions. NUPE, despite its much maligned press image, are the greatest cut throats of them all. Equally,

not all FTOs will sell you out - though an awful lot will. Three FTOs stood by us to the end, one of whom seriously putting his job in jeopardy in the process.

If you are wronged by a union, don't waste your time appealing against it. All unions are expert at closing ranks. You stand a better chance and fairer treatment if you are nursing a grievance, by appealing to the management side. Frequently in the old days there was much talk of us forming our own union. The more we explored the possibility the more problems we saw. In retrospect we should have had a go.

NHS Management: In a field in which even the people (McKinley Business Consultants) who worked out the reorganised structure, admit it was a basic mistake, it's not unnaturally a shaky occupation to be in. Not unsurprisingly much fear exists in its ranks. There is much pressure on managers to cope with headline budgets. Hence the ones who seek promotion are the ones who cope and can get by without raising too much union / public pressure. Certainly one of the most upsetting tactics that led to our dismissals was our practice of running managers up the Grievance Procedure ladder. As a tactic it hit at the very root of modern management theory - viz avoid at all costs showing a superior manager that you have problems handling employee / union grievances.

Imaginative Industrial Action: Works extremely well. A small number of people can launch a dispute quickly with maximum impact. Disadvantage, the workforce comes to rely on it to solve all disputes. It doesn't involve the workforce in participating in direct industrial action. The national press are only interested in industrial action that harms patients.

Calderstones now: Union activity is non-existent. COHSE has collapsed and the reliable grapevine reports that privately management gloat on how easy the place is to manage. But still there are wards being run by one nurse ...

The Police: Long ago we learned, interestingly from a young lady who was having an affair with a constable, that our Executive was being 'monitored' and indeed all industrial disputes in the area were noted by the 'branch' (Special Branch) and files kept on key people involved. There were occasions, and particularly the period just after our suspensions when

something strange was happening to our telephone. But I must have been drunk, I can't really believe things like that can happen ...

Politics: Now this is a hard one. There are a lot of Marxist abbreviations knocking about in Trades Unions - the majority get labelled as such, and once management or a Trade Union can slot you into a category then you are much easier to deal with. From the start I moved on the basis that it was my job to *represent* my members' views. As such I kept my politics to myself as say, a Christian would. I met many Marxists in the movement but never once an Anarchist. There exists much sympathy and enthusiasm for anarchist methods of doing things. Once you attach the label 'anarchist' to them, people become frightened.

I always objected to people applying the label 'militant' to me. I said then and now that I was not a 'militant' nor a 'moderate'. I was someone who was attempting to be 'honest'.

An interesting anecdote about this case was when one of my friends tackled a manager involved in our sackings. Admittedly they were both propping up the bar but during the conversation out came this little gem:

'People with political views like that shouldn't be employed in hospitals.'

'What political views?'

'Bloody Anarchists.'

To Date

Tony managed to get a job in a moulding factory on bread line wages. He is still writing to hospitals who are short of nurses. We still meet for a jar or two - we've seen much together. Folks interested in reading further in this case should look into the legal section of any large library and ask for a copy of *INDUSTRIAL RELATIONS LAW REVIEW*. If you sit in the legal department long enough (as I did) you will eventually meet many people (as I did) who are defending themselves at a Tribunal, each one accuses a Trade Union of 'selling them out'. Why oh why doesn't someone do 'research' on these people.

I eventually got a job as a bus driver. I find it mind killing but I'm grateful for the work. We've been rehoused and now live on the edge of a large council estate in Clitheroe. But there's always something on the horizon and news is that big Doreen Frampton SRN has been released and we plan to press out the next edition of *Anarchism Lancastrium*.

The National Health Service: The answer to this mess is too simple. Put the power and the decision making back on ward level. There will still be a need for administrators but their role should be urgently redefined as back-up support for the front line troops. In the last analysis there is no reason why patients and relatives cannot run their own wards and hospitals, working with the medical staff. I know from my ten years of nursing experience that people with learning disabilities and those classed as mentally ill are very capable of running their own lives on one hundredth of the present budget.

In the meantime we have a morass of Divisional Nursing Officers, District Personnel Officers, Sector Nursing Officers, Area Administrators, Deputy Nurse Education Officers, Clothing Co-ordinators, Unit Domestic Managers, Unit Nursing Officers amongst others all standing in the way.

Really, something should be done about it

Peter Good

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