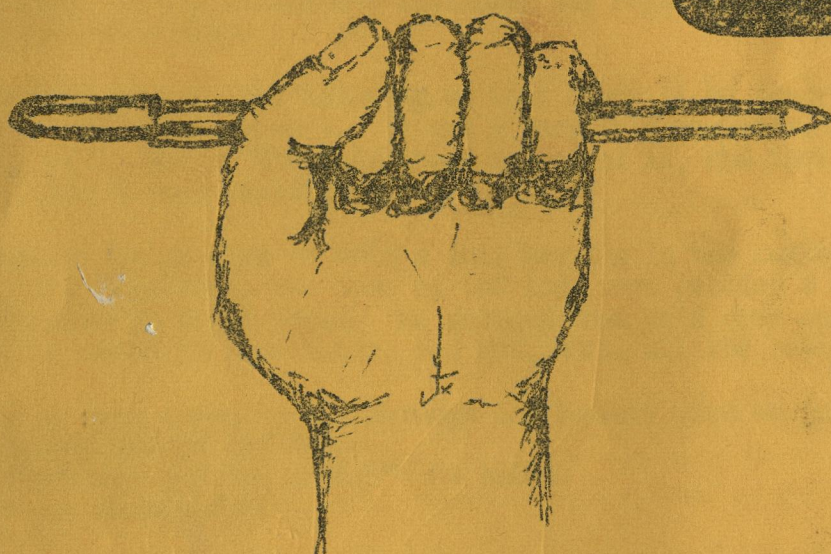


write on



10p.

**Some Writing
From The
Commonword
Workshop**

No 2

12a Piccadilly, Manchester.1

Phone 061-236-5195.

STICKY FOOD AND STARCHY GRUB by Mike Rowe

When, for reasons known better to herself, Trudie wants to wind me up, all she has to do is remind me of one of the two following facts: (a) I'm getting old (b) I'm putting on weight.

The former I can't do much about. After one passes twenty five, all one can do is resign oneself to growing old gracefully. (Who am I kiddin', I'm determined to grow old, permanently in BAD grace.) But the latter I can do something about. Like I can stop consuming sticky food, and starchy grub.

Last winter we had a strike over the heating conditions. It was bloody freezing in the Main Shop, although it was O.K. in the Auxillary Shop where I work, as all the heaters in there were working.

The Shop Stewards' Committee had made several requests, throughout the Summer, to the Management regarding the repairing of the hot air heaters in the Main Shop.

The Management kept assuring us that 'They'll be ready for the winter switch on.' But they weren't. It was a very cold November, and there wasn't a heater working. The Lads stuck a week of it, and then they asked the Steward to call a full meeting.

Monday dinner-time we held a full meeting in the canteen. It was really grim in the Main Shop, and some of the Lads were getting a bit paranoid about being attacked by Polar Bears. We decided that we'd done enough futile requesting, so we voted to down tools, and out, until all the heaters were repaired.

As we were trooping out through the factory yard we passed one of the Directors getting out of his Rover.

'Where are you lot going?' He asked.

No-one answered him.

We set up the strike headquarters in the Transport Cafe at the bottom of the road from the factory. A lot of the Lads used the Cafe at dinner-times, so the proprietor was co-operative with us. I myself never used the Cafe, as I once had occasion to take dinner there, and found it extremely greasy, and unpleasant. However, whilst the strike was on, I made a habit of getting there early in the morning, so that I could play a couple of records on the juke box before the others arrived. (One thing in the proprietor's favour, he kept a good juke box.)

On the second day of the strike we decided to call the General Secretary of the Union in. When he got down to the Cafe, he told us that we had acted 'rather hastily', but seeing that we were in no mood to go back to the Antarctic conditions, he suggested that we should aim for a speedy settlement.

The Secretary, and the Steward from the Main Shop, went as a delegation to see the Management. They were back inside half an hour. The Managing Director had put a flea in the Secretary's ear for not keeping his minions in order. He also told them that nothing would be done on the heaters until the men went back to work.

The Secretary was blazing mad at the rebuff he had received. He told us that if we recommended the men to return to work he would call the Factory Inspectorate in, as he was sure that even the most incompetent of Factory Inspectors would slap an immediate 'Improvement Order' on the heaters.

We told the Secretary that no-one was stepping back inside the Factory

until the heaters were fixed, and asked him to call the Factory Inspectorate in anyway.

The Factory Inspector came after dinner. He went to see the Management first, then he came into the Cafe to see us. He declined my offer of a cup of tea, with a wave of his hand, and sat down on the end of the table we were sat at.

'Right Lads,' he started. 'I've been into the Factory, and checked the temperature, and apart from the Main Shop everything seems reasonable.' 'What's the temperature in the Main Shop?' One of the Lads asked, before he went any further.

'It's thirty eight degrees Fahrenheit.' He answered.

I already had the Factories Act out. 'So, they're breaking the law then?'

'No.' He replied, shaking his hands. 'They would be if people were working in there, but, as no-one's working in there, they're not breaking any laws.' 'But it was as cold on Monday, and we were working in there then.' Moaned another of the Lads.

'But I wasn't there on Monday, so I wouldn't know, would I?' Returned the Factory Inspector.

'So,' I said. 'If we were to go back to work, they would be breaking the law?'

'Ah!' Said the Factory Inspector. 'If you were working on the Machinery in there they would be, as by law the area around woodwork ing machinery has to be at least fifty five degrees Fahrenheit. In the rest of the Shop there is no minimum temperature set by law. Although the Factory Inspectorate Commission has recommended that a temperature of around fifty degrees should be aimed for.'

'Recommended? What does that mean?' I asked.

'What it says.' He replied. 'It's a recommendation.'

'And there's nothing backing it up in Law?'

'No, unfortunately ther's nothing to back it up, only common sense.'

'Well you won't get much of that out of our Management!' The Main Shop Steward butted in. 'Anyway, what's the Management said about fixing the heaters?'

'He said that if you all went back, he'd have them fixed.'

'But if we all went back, we'd be working in unlawful, to say nothing of exceedingly dangerous conditions.' I groaned.

'And he's been saying that he'll fix the heaters for the last twelve months.' Chipped in the Main Shop Steward.

The Factory Inspector stood up. 'But if you all went back to work, I could serve him with an order to fix the heaters, and also I could recommend him to maintain a permanent temperature of fifty degrees in there.'

Sensing that we were all begining to get pissed off with the guy, I asked if we could confer between ourselves for a minute, and we gathered in a huddle around the juke box.

We had a quick discusion amongst ourselves, and decided that we weren't going back until the heaters were fixed, the temperature was up to fifty five degrees around the saws, and a thermometer was installed in the factory so that we could all know the temperature all the time.

When we announced our decision, the Secretary went off to see the Management, and the Factory Inspector went home, telling us to phone him when we were back at work.

The Cafe proprietor, who had been sympathetic to our cause all along, offered the four of us - free dinner apiece. Everyone accepted, excepting myself, as I still remembered the memory of the last one consumed there.

An hour, or so, later the Secretary came back in with a broad smile on his face. He told us that the Management had agreed to call in a firm of Maintenance Engineers, who were going to work on the heaters, day and night, until they were fixed.

On the Thursday we went into the Factory with a thermometer, and checked out the temperature in every nook and cranny. We found it to be satisfactory.

We were back in work again on the Friday. We lost a nice few quid in wages, but hopefully we won't have any mider over the heating again.

Shortly after that the Health Inspector had a surprise swoop on the Transport Cafe, and shut it down on a number of counts.

A BLOWING TREE BUSH

by LESLIE WILSON

I was in sight and thought of a misty blurr,
with my whole mind and body rushing into an
imaginary part of a small tree bush.

Tellings, telling me as if on an obvious understanding,
loving understanding, eternal understanding.
But some how boasting around, and up and down,
or some not so, then not quite so, into a dash of
quite so.

"What the hell, what the hell, what the hell
does it matter anyhow. Why the damn hell
should it. When the damn hell will it?"
I fought as hearing the squeeze of a cork,
or maybe a tiny branch on the move.

It was just a normal day, nothing all that special
to me, well nothing very special at all and in
the whole of the next one too.

It was just a small part of this day THAT I NEVER FORGOT,
as I lay down beaming tiredly in such, well, I'll
call it the coolest communication that seemed so long
and mysteriously long gone.



PASSAGE

Mary, Mary quiet and still
have you forgotton to take your pill
are you asleep, or are you aware
the spiders are creeping along your fair hair.

Mary, Of Mary I think you did ere
I see that your tablets are still on the chair
I told you, I told you to take only one
I see that you didn't and now you've passed on

TINKLE

I met a man the other night
I don't know why he took to flight
It must have been the torso cold
That I was dragging by the fold

MARY

Mary, Mary quiet and hairy
How does your stubble go
With electric razors, silver blades
And strokes down all in a row

GRANNIE

I am a frail old lady
With white stick and two limps
I scurry around the streets at night
Picking up the dimps.

BY PETER KAY

POEM ADDRESSED TO A POSTER OF KARL MARX

by Phil Boyd

Yeah, I read your book
- y'know, the big one
the one your mate completed
after you'd passed on
And I was impressed
But then how could I fail to be
when you ran such rings
round Smith and Bentham and the rest of them
-- who I've never read

Tell me, how does it feel
to write a best seller?
- quite a feat when you write
such lousy prose
And now the band-wagon's rolling
and all the zealots have climbed aboard
was it worth it?

You know your trouble don't you?
You look like a bloody saint
or an Old Testament prophet
with your white hair swept back
and curling round your ears
and your beard
bushing out from your chin
and your forehead so high and clear and creaseless
- was writing it really so effortless?
and your eyes staring serenely through me
into the future

You're a ready made icon
a natural superstar
that's what you are

Why the hell weren't you born a hunch back
With a birthmark blotched across your face?
- but you'd look like a martyr
with your bloody stigmata
and that'd be worse

You see, you make it all too damn easy.
Why was your logic so impeccable
the force of your analysis so unstoppable?
- but then if you weren't
you'd be another Bentham
or Smith
and I wouldn't be having this
absurd conversation
with your picture
on the wall

You tried to unravel the strands
that tied the workers
to the bosses
but you ended up writing a Bible

You're too fucking great
that's your trouble.

We couldn't follow you
so we learn't you
off by heart
and when we had to think for ourselves
it went wrong
most of the time

Why don't you say something?
Why don't you tell me where we went wrong?

But maybe it isn't your fault?
You likely didn't want to be there
on the wall.
And maybe if I met you in the street
and called you 'sir'
you'd laugh
and then I'd understand.

THAT WEDNESDAY

(One of a number of things I've tried to write
on my Grandad's death)

I saw an old man
gathering leaves into a plastic bucket
in the autumn wind

and I saw a sheet of plastic
shrouding a hedge of roses
from the autumn rain

that wednesday
my grandad died

phil boyd.

There were kids at the conference gates
I saw the remains,
In scruffy comrade hood
Five days on the road,
They yell at the police.
I know the feelings
Of sweat hard socks,
and crawling clothes,
No baths,

The quick lathing in cold greasy water,
wincing at the feel
of dirt reapplied.

But I did not know in full
What let them yell at the police
And stand there singing, rude, crude slogans
At their leaders,
Who curse their impudence
Disdain their presence.

"When I was their age I was fighting fascists."

Yeah, but you stopped and fascists march.

"There's jobs down the mines."

Funny I thought only Stalin wanted those he disliked
To be miners.

Should I name you, you who winced, you who could not wince,
You vitreol bitch whose comeless cunt wore your face in rage
As you ripped up my leaflet, mistook me for one of the kids.

No, I won't name you

You have names flaunted like a whores over used tool,
You belong in the media, you need to be owned,
It's a crime letting you walk free.

I'd rather name the kids,

But I knew none of their names, few of their faces.

I'll remember your fear, your hatred of kids

Whose crime was to be kids.

Thugs you called them,

Thugs are better than traitors.

Cannon fodder somebody else called them,

I'd sooner see them march to their doom

And attack
Than wait for solutions
Which with leaders like you might just be final.
Just think,
When you were young you fought
Those in power, those in the wrong,
Now these kids are fighting you
And you started the fight
By selling out what you once fought for.
Kids at the doors
And grown men
Grow chilled and afraid of kids.

John Koziol

Lets begin where I left of,
A year ago I left this boozier,
Said never again
Too much repetition hurts my brain,
But here again after a year,
Same bloody counter, same bloody beer,
They've changed the barmaid but they've not changed you,
And you've not changed at all,
You open your mouth and the same words fall,
You're a fixture, fixed here with your fixed mind,
Bet they ring your head to call time,
You'll still be here inctwenty years
I'll come in again, you'll discreetly cough,
And the conversation'll begin where I left off.

THE HANDBAG

Hair grips, lipsticks
Eye gloss to beautify
All flaws and weaknesses
Ready to rectify.
Last weeks shopping list
And the weeks before
Food cooked and eaten
But we still want more.
Access credit cards
So we don't have to pay
It's smart to be in debt
Leave it to Judgement Day.
Diaries full of gossip
Act as our confessor
And tablets from the Doctor
To eliviate the pressure.
Bills for this
Receipts for that
Crumpled together
Or folded flat.
Kidney Donor Card
Competes with the rest
Only when we're dead
Do we give our best.
Photo's of our loved ones
So we don't forget
How life was full of promise
On the day we met.
Free tickets for Tiffany's
A month out of date
An invitation from the husband's boss
To go and ingratiate.
A stick of Wrigley's gum
So our breath will not offend
A jumble is our lives
And a jumble is our end.

CELIA ROBERTS
COMMONWORD

WINTER

Each new face
Each new situation

Is like a tendril
Leading to the open mouth

I put out feelers
But the barriers
Are hard to break down

I see the lips
Frozen in a frost smile

Each face a hungry cavern
Its only recourse
Is to feed on ice

But whatever the weather
I still follow

Though they hold me off,
When the Spring comes
Maybe I'll break that ice

Or will there only be
Silent screams with the thaw?

BEAUTY COUNTER ENCOUNTER

I feel like a man when I'm with you

With your platinum blonde hair
And your scarlet-dipped fingers.
I sit a wedge-shaped block
With little blackcurrant eyes.

I feel I'm in drag when I'm with you

With your new dress yeilding
And every curve displayed discreetly.
My voice sounds like the mud
You churn up with your stilleto heels.

I feel like a dog when I'm with you

With your half-smiles bestowed
And your oh so simples
Glittering and stalking
Blocking off my sunlight.

I feel like a man when I'm with you.

SPELT OUT

Correcting his open book
The teacher eyed him crossly,
"You've spelt 'lonlyness' wrong," he said,
"There's an 'I' in the centre of loneliness,
"There's no 'Y'".

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MARRIAGE LINES OR TRUE LIFE CONFESSIONS

I think of you on the toilet
My heart opens with my bowels
My love for you makes me bleed
Like blood on sanitary towels.

CELIA ROBERTS