

RMT PICKET OF WESTMINSTER CITY HALL

by Eddie Lambert

At 2.30pm on Wednesday 20th May a picket was formed at the entrance to Westminster City Hall in Victoria Street to protest at the deteriorating situation in the borough for taxi drivers and other mobile workers who needed to answer a call of nature. The first warnings of problems came a few weeks earlier in the year, when the taxi ranks alongside the toilets known in the taxi trade as the “Iron Lung” at the junction of Horseferry Road and Regency Street, were declared “suspended”. Traffic Wardens were spotted lurking in dark alleys and dingy doorways within a short distance. As desperate drivers seeking to relieve bursting bladders made their way to the toilets, the wardens made their move using parked vehicles to shield their approaches and slipping from doorway to doorway to escape the desperate hackney drivers notice, they pounced as soon as the driver had thought they had reached heaven and entered the toilet cubicle. Using the time the drivers were out of contact with the world, they delivered their evil cargo, taking trophy pictures, and vanished back whence they came before they had to face the wrath of the returning driver.

Soon rumours of a darker motive for these nefarious actions started to circulate around the taxi trade. A dark Lord of the infamous Thatcher Cabinet was said to dwell in a building close by and for some unknown reason was sensitive to the close proximity of the rank. Whether there is any truth in this is not at present clear but going on past history, the balance of probability must come down in favour of this. After all, it is well known that a former Leader of Westminster City Council had the taxi rank at Paddington Station reversed so taxis exited by Praed Street instead of Bishops Bridge Road, and were forced west so the taxis didn't pass their dwelling in Norfolk Square.

The picket at City Hall also attracted support from wheeled horsemen who have been conducting their own war with the dark powers that reside in the great hall. In a land where some of the richest people in the world, let alone Britain reside, the forces of darkness had decreed that since the congestion charge had reduced the number of chariots and the like which paid to stop at the roadside for a period they needed another source of gilt to help keep their residency tax down to the lowest level in the mighty city. They introduced an experimental charge for leaving the two wheeled horses on the highways in the borough. These horsemen were few in number due to receiving news of the picket late in the day but they joined in with the noise and passed on a message that they would be back on the afternoon of Tuesday 9th June gathering their forces in Berkeley Square from 5.45 before descending en mass to Piccadilly Circus down the Haymarket along Pall Mall to Regent Street and back up to Piccadilly Circus.



During a branch meeting of the newly formed RMT Taxis London a decision was taken to mount a picket to protest at the actions of WCC. Since the issue of the toilets had been raised in the trade press the RMT had been receiving phone calls from drivers and hearing stories of them suffering from stress of the bladder, due to the situation across the borough where toilets have been closed and shadowy figures lie in wait for unfortunate drivers, and of course the all seeing eye is never far away.

The picket was well received by passers-by who almost to a man and damsel supported our position. Much was made of it on the local radio stations as well and following the picket, Martin Low, Head of Transportation, issued a press release offering talks with the RMT Taxis and said that “they are working on a package for the trade that would give us free parking and toilets in the borough”. We have accepted this offer and look forward to informing the trade of the details. Hopefully this package of measures will fulfil the needs of the trade, and others with vehicles and the like who need to answer the call of nature in Westminster.



John Pace