

Solidarity

JOHN MULLEN

WE HAD just finished our strike-committee meeting yesterday morning when Jimmy Armilla comes into the room, looks around and then beckons to me to follow him. He walked out and I went out after him. As we walked down the street toward the picket lines, Jimmy says to me:

"I was over to the relief shanty just now . . . and you better come down there with me . . . things ain't so good."

"What's wrong?" I inquired.

"Relief's about gone . . . and the cooks are worried," he answers.

Jimmy was worried too. He's usually cheerful, no matter how bad things are breaking. Jimmy has been head of the relief committee ever since we organized it over a month ago and has been doing a good job in raising food for the strikers. It was only shortly after he was given the job of feeding a large part of the twelve hundred strikers and their families that needed relief, that he had things humming. He got hold of an old blacksmith's shanty up near the Diamond mine shaft, about ten minutes' walk from the picket lines on the mill we are striking here. In no time at all he had organized relief committees which scoured the country-side, bring-

ing automobile loads of farm stuff which the truck farmers donated to the strikers. Sacks of potatoes, hundreds of pounds of beets, turnips, onions, came in from the small farmers. Occasionally a farmer gave a pig, others sometimes donated several chickens. One even gave us a rather angular cow right after the strike started. Jimmy, in consultation with the strikers who volunteered as cooks, decided to keep the cow in reserve for emergency purposes, so they tethered her in a sparse grass patch in a small field above the relief kitchen.

The cow didn't get on so well, being kind of mangy to start with, but she gave a little milk now and then. Jimmy used the milk for a few of the strikers' kids who had taken sick. The kids named the cow "Solidarity," after a union song we sang on the picket lines.

Solidarity didn't seem to be aware that a strike was on and that she occupied an honored position among the strikers. She was merely annoyed by the fact that the grass refused to grow like nature had intended it to grow. That's the way it is out here in this steel and mining country. The grass and flowers for the most part keep away from these towns. The soot and smoke from the mills and the sulphur fumes from the mine

slag-heaps kill everything green. Only the most hardy and courageous kind creeps timidly into these towns from the countryside. So Solidarity wasn't getting very fat.

I was thinking of all these things as Jimmy walked to the shanty with me. In a few more minutes we were there.

The shanty itself was not much to see, being built many years ago to shoe the horses and mules for a strip mine nearby, now worked out and abandoned. But it was serviceable, and our cooks, two Greeks and one Italian woman, had installed great copper boilers for cooking cauldrons for coffee, and in the rear there was a brick oven on which the food was cooked. In another corner was stored the food that the relief committees had collected; vegetables, boxes of macaroni, and from the low clapboard roof hung smoked meats, garlic and dried onions. Several plank tables had been built in front of the shack, protected from rainy weather by a roof of tar paper, donated by a small hardware dealer over in town.

We walked in and the cooks stopped work at once. We all sat down and started to talk. Jimmy spoke to the Italian woman, the wife of a striker named Gigli, and then translated her conversation to me. It seemed, accord-



Philip Nesbit

ing to Jimmy, that she was in charge of all the cooking, and had noticed a serious shortage developing over the past few days, especially in the meats. Some vegetables were still coming in, but she and the other two cooks were having a hard time making the huge pots of stew that had become the main dish of the relief kitchen.

The problem was serious, so I said to the cooks:

"Can't we use the vegetables for soup, adding what little meat we got?"

One of the Greeks answered: "Need fresh meat make good soup for strikers," and he slapped his dirty aproned belly to indicate his contempt for anything that didn't have strong meat in it.

The Italian woman and the other cook nodded in agreement. Then I suddenly thought of Solidarity, and I asked them, in a surprised manner, why they didn't use her for stew. They looked at each other and back at me very solemnly, but they didn't answer my question. Jimmy acted as though he was busy trying to decipher the trade-mark on a box of macaroni and didn't hear my question. I repeated my inquiry. Then Jimmy kicks the box of macaroni as if it was responsible for our predicament and tells me: "We thought of slaughtering her this morning when the meat ran out..."

"Haven't we got anybody among the strikers who can do the butchering... why don't we do it?" I asked him.

The cooks just had nothing to say all this time. I knew there was something peculiar in the whole situation. So I persisted. Finally Jimmy blurts out: "Well, y'see we kinda got to like Solidarity around the shanty here... and the kids have a great time with her..." He put the thing rather lamely.

"She's a cow even if she is named Solidarity, and we need meat." I spoke sharply.

"Oh, that ain't all," Jimmy says. "We've been using Solidarity as sort of a way of showing the bosses we got so much relief we don't need her... and the strikers feel better, knowing we got a whole cow we don't need."

"Yes, but we need her now... she's got to be butchered before tomorrow morning. That will give us enough meat to hold us over until we get more in."

I stood up to dismiss the matter when I said this, and Jimmy shook his head slowly, in agreement. The cooks looked at Jimmy and he nodded to them. They walked back to the rear of the kitchen and started to work again. Then Jimmy and I walked out of the shanty.

I saw Solidarity over in the field and walked over to look at her. She was plenty thin and her ribs looked like a piece of hide stretched over some barrel hoops. But she would do for a few days and would make a lot of stew. She didn't seem aware that I had just passed death sentence on her, and kept right on munching in a little spot of grass.

Well, today, I went up to the kitchen real early in the morning and sure enough you could smell the stew all around the place. Solidarity, or part of her at least, was in the pot. Jimmy came along at the same time, and we sat down to eat. We always ate early in the mornings with the cooks, so that we could avoid the rush a little later and be back at strike headquarters, getting things ready for the day.

Gigli's wife brought a big dish of stew out of the shanty and put it down on the plank table. She started back to get more, but Jimmy called to her in Italian before she went into the shanty. In a minute she came out with a pot of coffee and a chunk of salami. Under her arm she had a loaf of old rye bread. She put these on the table for Jimmy. I looked at him and at the salami: "No stew? Salami's not good for you six o'clock in the morning."

"Not hungry," Jimmy informs me.

"You always had a good appetite before in the mornings."

"Aw, lay off, will you, Johnny?" he barks. "I ain't hungry, that's all."

The two cooks came to the shanty door and bade us good morning. I waved a fork at them, with a chunk of Solidarity on the end and said: "Ain't you going to eat with us?"... "We eat already!" they answered, and went back into the shack to get ready for the crowd that would soon be coming for the stew.

Witness at Leipzig

EDWIN ROLFE

Under torture and other pressure in a Nazi concentration camp, two Communists renounced their views and signed a statement implicating the Communist Party in the Reichstag fire. They were brought to the trial by the Nazis as witnesses for the prosecution. On the witness stand, however, knowing that their testimony would mean life or death for them, they declared they had been tortured into signing the statement and, reaffirming their positions as Communists, they turned their testimony into a valiant and crushing attack upon the Nazi prosecution.

NEWS ITEM.

I am glad I am here; I have said
what my heart not my lips have uttered
always, in dungeons under lash and where
to mutter under the breath meant death.

I have come through forested distances
over bloody highways where the dead
have trod; have killed words in me, shed
the thousandth skin of my soul—and all

my blood which flows too fast remembers
cries, mad laughter of wracked friends,
comrades lost to the living, wedded
to God! the swastika stitched on.

Yet I am proud I have come have spoken here:
this stand before you, justice, is my guillotine
surely as truth is on my lips today
which all but burst the heart these many months.

Dimitroff speaks this truth; his sentences
resound beyond the rafters of this room.
Hear Nazi judge, at you! and you, brown prosecutor,
his words like doom are aimed.

I tell this too—may't damn the court
before dawn rises on my severed head!—
to you, gentlemen: these close walls
have ears and tentacles that reach

beyond all prisons and above all time
that you conceive. I say our Party
knew nothing of the fire but foretold your death
who now claim mine. I know this stand's

my last, this room the final room
where I shall walk alive and speak
to enemy or friend. Yet I am strangely
proudly glad that this is so.