

# The March To Aldermaston

JOHN ROSSELLI

LONDON  
“ENGLAND ARISE! The long dark night is over.” So the loud-speaker voice called out, reverberating along a country road in Berkshire on Easter Monday. A column of men, women, and children headed by a tall black banner advanced along the road toward the shiny new town of Aldermaston, the site of Britain’s Atomic Energy Research Establishment. It was the last day of the coldest Easter weekend in forty years; it was also the last day of the Aldermaston march, a fifty-mile trudge that a group of pacifists and left-wing Socialists had organized to demand that everyone should stop testing, using, or making nuclear weapons.

In the column, three thousand strong, there were blue-denimed students in beards or pony tails; there were middle-aged housewives in bright berets and shoes that were never meant for route marches, some of them wheeling children in perambulators; there were young men with a suspicious gift for chanting slogans; there was a retired colonel, a white-haired Quaker newspaper-woman, a debutante (famous in all the gossip columns) with blue eye shadow to match her jeans.

For four days, the march held the attention of a public whose anxiety over nuclear weapons is now a leading political issue. Along the road, women in their Sunday best clapped, a driver leaned out and shouted “Ostriches! Ostriches!” a boy held up a poster—“You March in Vain.” Most people along the route remained silent but few ignored the marchers.

IT ALL BEGAN modestly enough before Christmas as the brain child of a pacifist group centered on Harold Steele, a retired poultry farmer with mild china-blue eyes who had offered (unsuccessfully) to go and be blown up in the first test of a

British H-bomb. The original idea was that some fifty people, all devoted to Gandhi’s principle of non-violence, would walk from London to Aldermaston. By March the thing had snowballed. Talk of renouncing the bomb was in the air. Though the pacifists kept control to the last, left-wing Labour politicians moved in on an organizing committee that now had to plan for possibly thousands of marchers, for sleeping-bag space in schools and church halls along the route, and for a fleet of trucks to carry (among other supplies) that mainstay of all British expeditions, the tea urn.

The march itself fell into three phases. On the first day, Good Friday, it had an atmosphere only London can produce—a sort of gentle outing shot through with vaudeville. Of the four thousand who gathered in Trafalgar Square and then set out to walk eleven miles to the outskirts, many had no intention of going any farther. Mrs. Helen Jarvis, a lady with strong opinions on the iniquity of “state money,” marched with a banner that read “Make H. Jarvis Premier.” Some young Cockneys in bowler hats rocked and rolled enthusiastically in front of the Albert Memorial when the march halted for a picnic lunch: they were there as fans of the jazz band that played the march through West London. (“‘Course I’m for peace,” one of their girl friends said. “I dunno about these others, though.”)

But already you could find the earnest mothers (“I’ve three children, that’s why I’m here”); the teachers, some with outsize chips on their shoulders (“I’m carrying a pack here because my two brothers carried a pack on the Burma railway [where many prisoners of war died] and they didn’t have cups of tea every four and a half miles”); the Quakers and other pacifists.

It was these people, not the rock-

n’-rollers, who stuck it out on Saturday and Sunday, when snow, rain, and cold thinned down the march to a number fluctuating between six hundred and a thousand. They held out at least as well as the “politicals”—left-wing Labour members, ex-Communists disillusioned over Hungary, vaguely but hotly radical seventeen-year-olds.

Outright Communists were not much in evidence until the last day, when, amid the confusion of the final rally in a field opposite the AEA buildings, some “peace” delegations and *Daily Worker* newsboys turned up who hadn’t wasted much shoe leather on the roads. This may explain the one serious incident that marred the nonviolent purpose of the march—a short but, until the police stepped in, violent attack by a dozen men on a car that was broadcasting charges against the marchers of “bringing Budapest butchery to England” and “voting with their feet for Soviet imperialist domination.”

THAT LAST DAY, Monday, brought back the jamboree, though not in its full London glory of beards and funny hats. Last-minute arrivals swelled the march to some three thousand, while a thousand or two more waited in the field. On the last mile past the AEA buildings—eerily empty behind their wire fence—the marchers were silent except for the burbling of children in perambulators. After that the rally was an anticlimax. Pastor Martin Niemöller, just over from Germany, ignored his hearers’ damp, aching, and blistered feet and made a forty-minute oration. At the end, while the chairman was still crying “This is not the end, this is the beginning of a campaign,” people were already streaming away to their busses and trains—and beds.

On the march they had agreed on almost nothing. Some were against all arms, some not; some wanted to give up the British bomb at once, some merely to negotiate with it and stop the spread of nuclear weapons to countries like France or Egypt; some were all for moral gestures, some wanted limited political action. The only thing they agreed on was that they had to do *something* about the bomb.

# Vodka Is the Curse Of the Workers' State

CHARLES W. THAYER

A WAVE OF ALCOHOLISM has struck the Soviet Union and its satellites. In Czechoslovakia and Hungary, liquor consumption has risen by twenty-five per cent in the past few years; in Poland, consumption increased by forty per cent last year alone.

Khrushchev himself has sounded the alarm. "It is high time we faced up squarely to the problem of drunkenness," he told a meeting of White Russian farmers. He called for severe penalties against the many bootleggers who are setting up illegal stills throughout the countryside. He rebuked the state liquor industry for fulfilling its norms with too much enthusiasm, and for once blamed not Hollywood but the Soviet film industry for popularizing bibulous heroes.

To infer from these alarums that the Soviet régime is sitting on an explosive gin mill that is about to blow the system into oblivion would be, to quote Khrushchev again, expecting a shrimp to whistle. The Iron Curtain countries have enough policemen to cope with both the bootleggers and the drunks. But what doubtless disturbs the leaders in Moscow, Warsaw, and Prague much more is the apathy and disillusionment among their subjects, of which drinking is only the most conspicuous manifestation.

IT IS NOT only the weary, disheartened norm-ridden worker who is seeking relief through the bottle. Intellectuals, particularly writers and artists, frustrated perhaps by the censors' demands for "socialist realism," are with increasing frequency finding solace in drink. Some, like the famous novelist Alexander Fadeev, have committed suicide in fits of alcoholic depression. More recently, several prominent authors were expelled from the Writers' Union for habitual drunkenness. The same problem is afflicting the satellite

writers, especially in Poland and Hungary. A recent Polish cartoon depicting a very drunken young man bears the caption: "Good Lord! And he's just started to be a writer!"

The Communist authorities are even more alarmed by the spectacular increase of drinking among young people than by drunken workers or intoxicated writers. "Alcohol is running in streams in the schools," says a writer in a Polish paper. According to an indignant Soviet mother, fathers are teaching their children to drink hard liquor at the age of four. A survey in Czech schools found only two out of 1,700 children who had never had a hard drink.

On my last journey to Russia it seemed that drunkenness had indeed become the order of the day—especially for the young people. By evening, in the back streets of Moscow you could count a stupefied body in the gutter of every block.

Some authorities blame youthful drinking on the miserable living conditions in workers' barracks, where boys live four bunks to one small room and have to hide their shoes under their pillows lest someone steal them. In these hostels any kind of entertainment after work is out of the question—except vodka.

A Polish doctor blames it on nerves. "People are overtired, nervous, disillusioned. They were driven to work too hard. We are ruled by nerves, nerves, nerves—and drink like sponges, fish."

Sheer boredom, however, seems the chief cause of drunkenness. "Boredom," says a Czech writer, "leads to drunkenness. . . . Liquor is the antidote to boredom." Another Czech complains: "For the majority of our people amusement is synonymous with getting drunk." A Polish writer describes how in France, England, Germany, and elsewhere in the West young boys can take their girls to dance halls. "But

in Poland it is different. In summer the young worker can take his girl walking in the country; but in winter . . . downhearted, homeless, and shivering, they simply wander about the streets keeping themselves warm with a bottle of vodka from the boy's hip pocket."

To cope with the drunks, the Soviet police maintain their famous "sobering stations," where on holiday evenings a steady procession of Black Marias deposit those who have passed out in the streets. These stations are a distinct improvement over the methods of dealing with drunks when I first went to Russia. During the bitter winter of 1933-1934, I once found a man passed out in a heap of snow and hurried to tell the nearest policeman lest the drunk freeze to death. The policeman merely shrugged his shoulders. "I can't leave my beat," he said, and continued on his way. Now, twenty-odd years later, I was passing Sobering Station No. 3 in the Arbat District of Moscow one evening and went in to see how it worked.

## Taking the Cure

Policemen who wore white smocks over their uniforms and carried syringes, sponges, and stethoscopes were bustling about, gently guiding unsteady patients from one room to another and making entries in the reception book or questioning patients who had taken the treatment of steam baths and sleep.

A thin young man in a badly wrinkled suit, his face lobster-colored, stumbled dazedly out of a back room. A policeman nodded to an army colonel who was seated in the waiting room: "Your son," he said. As the officer rose, the young man started back, but his father took him by the arm and led him grimly out of the building.

Only then did the busy attendants notice me. Explaining politely that foreigners had to have the mayor's permission to inspect the station, they hustled me out the door.

The satellite countries have also set up sobering stations, and their press is constantly crying for more of them. However, sobering stations are not a remedy, they readily admit, but an unavoidable result of the recent binges.

New proposals for the control of